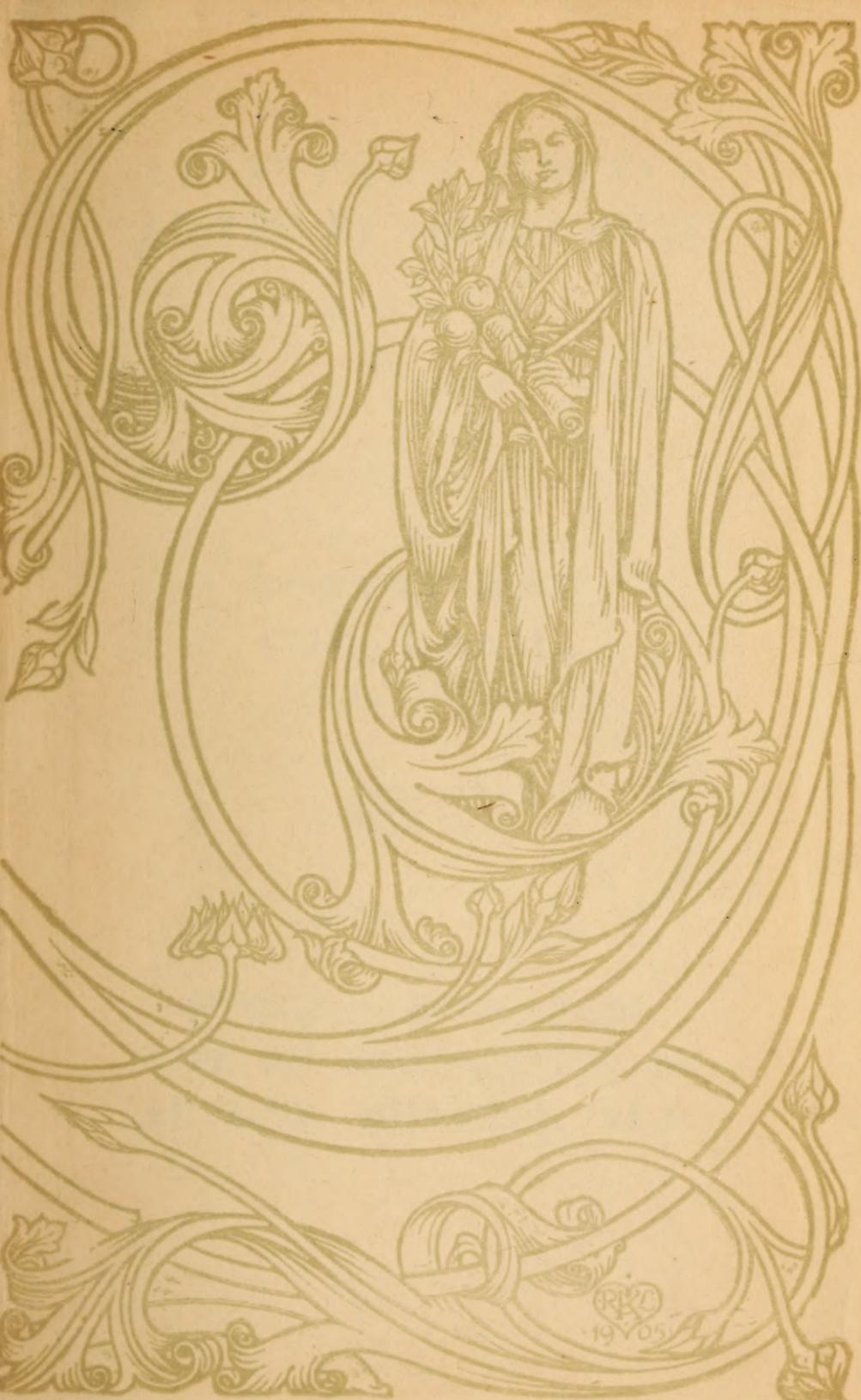


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I WILL GO WITH  
THEE,  
& BE THY GUIDE  
IN THY MOST NEED  
TO GO BY THY SIDE



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POETRY AND  
THE DRAMA



PIERS PLOWMAN  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
ARTHUR BURRELL, M.A.

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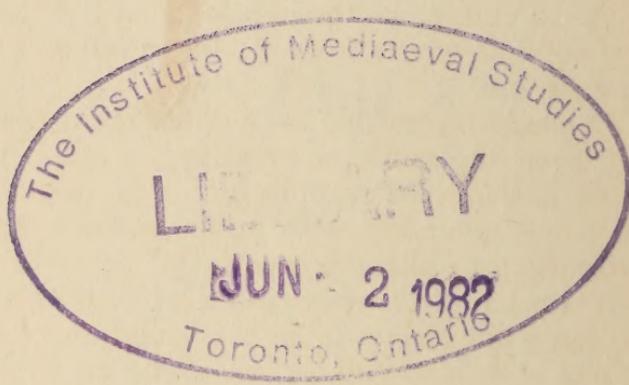


POETS ARE THE TRUMPETS WHICH SING TO BATTLE  
POETS ARE THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS OF THE WORLD

SHELLEY

PIERS . . .  
PLOWMAN  
*The Vision of a  
Peoples Christ by  
William Langland.  
A Version for the  
Modern Reader.*  
BY • ARTHUR  
BURRELL M:A

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## INTRODUCTION

IN bringing before the reader a version of this amazing book, I wish, as in the case of my edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, to disarm, if I can, the criticism of the scholar. My version is not intended in any sense for those who can read with ease the alliterative poems of the fourteenth or earlier centuries. Knowing, however, that it requires very careful study to read *Piers Plowman* with ease and pleasure, I have occasionally omitted and always simplified. I have tried to preserve and bring out the meaning, the careless alliteration, and the elusive rhythm. I have regularly modernised the spelling, and have indeed followed the example set by the most learned editor of the poem, who has himself published a modernised text: indeed there are several of such texts in the market. This, as in the case of the Chaucer, is the whole of my offence. The specialist will find echoes from M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat everywhere.

*Piers Plowman* is regarded as the poor mans book. But, though I hope the spirit is preserved, I have resolutely avoided by any phrase reading into it a special message for to-day. A comment with notes inwoven has indeed called attention to singular survivals, parallels in social life, but these parallels would, even without the reference to them, force themselves upon the attention of any one.

Much has been made about the confusion in the poem; but the main scheme is perfectly clear. Under the favourite form of a vision, it is a picture and an arraignment of the England of Edward III. and Richard II. As the first Isaiah, said to have been a young aristocrat, listened to the call in the Temple, and left a life of ease to act for thirty years as the unsparing critic of the Jerusalem and Judah of his day, so *per contra* our author, a man of humble extraction, it would seem, and of no social pretension, hurled his invective, his satire, and his grim fun at the London and the England of Chaucers time. He is an Old

Testament prophet with English humour added to Hebrew seriousness. We are, whatever we think of the question of authorship, in the presence of one who when in earnest is terribly in earnest, whether he is describing the great plain which lies below Malvern Hills, or the marriage of Jobbery to Falsehood, or the shriving of Gluttony and Wrath, or the iniquities of the hated lawyers at Westminster, or the beauty of Charity, or the triumphant march on Hell by Piers Plowman, the man Christ Jesus. Picture after picture paints the same story, preaches the same sermon; and the story and the sermon are these. The world is good enough if man were not so bad; the birds sing blissfully enough if underneath there droned not on the note of misery; life is sweet and jolly enough if men were not so bitter; Malvern Hills are fair enough if only in the plain, in the great Field Full of Folk, there were more charity, more honesty, more simplicity, more useful work, and a greater wish to set forth on the great pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is not to Canterbury or Walsingham or Compostella or Rome; it is a pilgrimage to Truth, the saint whom men so regularly disregard.

“ Knowest thou a holy saint  
Canst thou tell us of the way

that men call Truth?  
where that saint dwelleth?”

“ God bless me, nay,”  
“ Never saw I palmer  
That asked after Truth

quoth this fellow then.  
with pike-staff and with scrip,  
till ye now in this place.”

Instead of seeking Truth, men seek money; instead of honouring Love, they honour Wrath; instead of dealing honestly, they bow down before Pride, Flattery, Bribery, Corruption, and Jobbery, branded under the title of Lady Meed, who is the thin disguise of Alice Perrers, the infamous mistress of Edward III. Kings are weak, barons are cats that seize and possess about the people of the realm, knights are idle hunters, lawyers are thieves; monks and nuns are no better than they should be, merchants are swindlers, bankers are coin-clippers, and all the wonderful array of papal officers and English churchmen are mere plunderers of the land, pocket-fillers, and cheaters of the people. As for Friars, “ there was one good Friar, in the days of Francis, but that was long ago.” Neither Wit nor Learning, Scripture nor Imagination, helps the seeker one

jot in his pilgrimage; words, words, words, are the end of them. The working man, God save the mark, is an idler, a drinker, a spoil-work, a wastrel, a loafer, and an unemployable; the professional beggar, with limbs professionally broken for his trade, is no worse than he; and ruffling Regulars, covetous lords, cheating shopmen, idle priests, lying pilgrims, and fine-furred harlots, jostle one another in the chaos of the scene. Through all, warning all, and at times tearing and punishing all, stalk the shadow forms of Plague and Storm and Famine, regularly visiting England, God's messengers to the generation that have clean forgotten Him; and though Piers Plowman may go down to Hell and fetch Humanity from Satan's grip, yet there rises the dread shape of Antichrist and sweeps that sweet and gentle figure from the scene; "and it was night."

This is the first impression that one gets of the book known as *Piers Plowman*; but it is a first impression only. Another reading shows another side. Kings may be weak, but they are resolved to deal sharply with Lady Meed. Reason and Conscience have by no means left the land; they plead passionately for the punishment of Wrong (the king's officer). Barons and knights are not all wicked; they can rule far better than the people could who would try their hand at government; and it is they who will, when the time comes, bring the Church to the bar of judgment. Gentlemen are willing and even anxious, though almost impotent, to help against the disorders of the day; some lawyers here and there will plead for God's poor and take no fee for it; some monks and nuns stay in their convents, some hermits in their cells, and there they work or pray; some honesty is still left in trade; and a bishop here and there knows his business, and parish priests here and there do not skip away to London, but stay in their parishes and comfort and feed their people. Unity and Peace and Conscience and Charity never cease to do their work in the human heart, and they raise the banner of the Christ in the field of Armageddon. The working man, the real, true, leal, honest, uncomplaining, working man, is up early and hard at work for very few pence; the cottage woman holds her head up and "puts a good face on it;" some of the beggars are Christ's poor who can perforce do nothing but lie as Lazarus did at Dives' door; and in the mob that fill

the Malvern plain, stretching to Worcester roofs, are honest traders, good ancles, and a stray woman of the streets, eager for the great pilgrimage. Through all, warning all, encouraging all, comes at length, though foreshadowed throughout the former scenes, an ordinary man, PIERS PLOWMAN, the people's man, the people's Christ, poor humanity adorned with love, hardworking humanity armed with indignation, sympathetic humanity clad in the intelligence that knows all and—makes allowances; at one time setting high-born ladies to work, at another passionately attacking the insolent priest, at another calling upon Famine to help him against the loafing, growling wastrel of the streets; but always encouraging the penitent sinful, helping the weak, leading the way in the great journey; a strange figure, Christ in humanity, humanity Christ-clothed, neither all a poor man, nor all a ploughman, nor all a Jesus, but fading and vanishing and reappearing in all forms of his humanised divinity, and ending as the Christ conqueror that from the Cross went down and burst the doors and defied the brazen guns of hell, and brought *Piers Plowmans Fruit* home with victory; yet, even in this majestic battle with Lucifer and Belial, Ragamuffin and Goblin, no omnipotent God far removed from the cares and sorrows of fourteenth-century England, but—

One like the Good Samaritan	and somewhat like Piers Plowman,
Barefoot, bootless,	without spur or spear,
Riding on an asses back,	brightly he lookèd
Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,	
To get him his gilt spurs	and his slashed shoon.

This is the general picture of the poem, or of such parts as are here wholly or partly transcribed.

The teaching of the book is negative in that, in face of the tremendous issues, it counsels no opposition to King, Church, Barons, or Knights. It is not inflammatory; it is no harbinger of the Reformation, though it contains a startling prophecy of that great event. It cannot be looked upon as anti-papal, though it was written in the time of the Great Schism; it distinctly disbelieves in the extremes of what the modern world calls democracy, although moral collectivism is its watchword; and it nowhere gives any support to the notion that it foresaw the coming of the great revolt of 1381, or approved of that revolt when it

came. It seems, notwithstanding a few political allusions, to be as remote from politics as are the Gospels themselves, and for the same reason. No form of government, it would say, is in itself bad, if men have the religious spirit; every form of government is bad if they have it not.

On the other hand, the teaching of the book is positive enough, in that it puts its finger on the abuses of the time, lawlessness, falseness, dishonesty, jobbery, money-grubbing, luxury, and idleness. Idleness of all things it cannot away with; the idle rich are scourged as much as the idle poor; idleness, with all its accompanying evils—begging, gluttony, dishonourable dealing, simony, neglect of plain duty, luxury senseless and unbridled, idleness is the unpardonable sin; and Professor Minto has sketched a curious parallel between this poem and the teaching of Thomas Carlyle, who possibly never had the book in his hands. If the undecided king is the victim of his circumstances, the wasters among the rich are what they are because they have not enough true work to do. The same may be said of the unworthy prelate—he does not do his true work. It may equally be said of pardoner, merchant, knight, lady, hermit, pilgrim, huckster and hewer, ditcher and delver. Truth (who stands confusedly for God the Father) rules that each man should have his work and do it well; and the heaviest condemnation of Truth is for those in all ranks of life who instead of working go a-hunting or sit by the road and sing “Hey Trolly Lolly” and “God save you, Lady Em.” Piers Plowman himself preaches *work*; he puts his mittens on and hangs a basket round his neck, a mock pilgrim, and off he goes to plough his half-acre. Indeed, the motto of the poem might be EACH MAN MUST PLOUGH HIS HALF-ACRE; but it must be ploughed without the thought of self-enrichment at the cost of others. Work is not enough; Pride and Flattery work, traitors work, lechers work, disers and minstrels work, thieves work, Liar works for the Friars, the Friars themselves work, merchants and their 'prentices work, the Pardoner works hard—they are all Judas children. It is not enough to work; a man must work honestly for himself *and* for his fellows; he must work for his religion, for his king, and for his country.

In the humorous section dealing with his own life, the writer condemns himself for idleness; and we in our day

should say he condemns himself with justice. His definite teaching is that of the Gospel, "The poor ye have always with you: more shame to you. Your rich England should have no poor: it is your bounden duty to rid the world of the miserably poor, and you can do it if you will, by making all work for all." "The poor ye shall have always with you" is a text he never refers to, because he knows that he cannot find it in the Gospels. No autocrat can be more severe than he upon those who will not work. He has one word for the able-bodied loafer, and one alone: "Starve him;" and he knows that such an heroic remedy had not been tried in his own day, any more than it has been tried since.

Along with this gospel of true work for self and others, for home and country, is his definite preaching of home sympathy. England for England is his cry throughout the poem. He hates to see the Pope meddle in the appointment of foreigners to livings that have not fallen vacant; he hates to see men carry good English money to Avignon or Rome; he hates to see men make pilgrimages to St. James and St. Peter, when the pilgrimages they should make are to jails and hospitals, and to their poorer neighbours cottages. If Englishmen go to Sinai and Bethlehem to seek the saints, for Gods sake let them stay there, he says; we want no such pilgrims here. You can find your true pilgrimage by going the round of your own parish.

Again, he is definite enough, as we should expect, in his demand for a clean life. The King has his Alice Perrers; she must go; the bishops have their lemans, the hermits and pilgrims their girls; the beggars breed like rabbits, and are never married. Luxury, lust, and lechery spell the same thing for him, and with unnecessary wealth comes unnecessary wantonness. In passage after passage he declaims against the fatal gift of Constantine and legacies to the Church: religion goes a-hunting with a pack of hounds at his tail, and with this wealth in money and lands comes the ill life, the life of wantonness. Stained windows and gorgeous churches, fine vestments and full church pockets, are as much anathema to him as are the evil deeds of Richard II. and of the king's officers who pay the poor in receipts instead of in money, and who rob the honest worker of his horse, of his wife's honour, and his maid's innocence.

He pleads too for a saner education and for wholesome correction. The working man is told to go and get two sticks and beat his idle wife; another is blamed because his wife's bonnet costs three pounds and his own cost five shillings. The gentleman cockers his children because he is afraid of their catching the plague; he never takes a stick to them. "Spare the switch and spill the son" is to him a maxim equally true if it be applied to idler, wife, thief, beggar, or child. He praises the good school, and laments that not enough money is spent in what we should call scholarships.

Finally, he devoutly prays that the Church will reform herself, and prophesies that if she will not do so the king and the barons will reform her in a way she will not like: and for the idler he begs that Famine will return to England, for only in the sharp correction of drought and hunger will England learn her lesson. That she will learn it finally he cannot hope; for after Calvary comes Antichrist, and Pride and Flattery regain their places; and with this his indignant spirit passes sadly into the dark.

No one can quite tell how far the author represents the true picture of his time. He is in general agreement with Chaucer, who was as earnest as he: any one will see this who cares to look below the surface of the *Canterbury Tales*. It is the custom to say Chaucer is the poet of the rich and Langland of the poor; that Chaucer laughed at and tolerated with Horatian *sang-froid* the foibles, the vices, and even the miseries of his day. Nothing, to my mind, can be further from the truth; and the plain fact is that while Langland is sardonic, indignant, fierce, you never know when you turn a page of Chaucer how near you are to tears; and it must be remembered by those who consider Chaucer an aristocrat and Langland a democrat, that Chaucer's poems include the figures of the Parson, Janicula, Griselda, the old man of the Pardoners Tale, and the numberless pictures of the good and charitable rich.

The questions that surround this poem as a text are most difficult. The reader may be referred to Professor Skeats monumental edition, of which it is needless to say I have made the fullest use; to Professor Manly's chapter in the second volume of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*; to Jusserand's beautiful and loving studies of the

poem; and to the bibliography given in the *Cambridge History*. Any one, however, who would feel the poem as it ought to be felt must have in his hands, if only for an hour, two books, first a black letter copy of the poem which in these days of reprints cries aloud for publicity, and secondly the volume in which Bishop Stubbs in a fine spirit of recognition has written of our author, *Christ in English Literature*.

We do not know for certain what was the original form of the poem; nor do we know when, how, or with what object the great additions to this form were made. The criterion of allusion will not fully serve as a means for settling dates; for when a work written before the days of printing is being, through forty years or more, constantly altered, contemporary allusion may creep in at any time. The utmost that can, at the present moment, be asserted without fear of contradiction is that the poem was written between 1360 and 1400; that it was constantly and in many cases carelessly revised, and large additions were made; that it was known well in some form by 1381, when a part at least of its teaching and the name of its central figure, Piers Plowman, were made free use of by the leaders of the mob which broke into London, hung the archbishop, killed the lawyers, and dragged the Flemings out of the churches to butcher them in the streets, and that traditionally it has thus been, most unfairly, regarded as the herald and literary expression of that mysterious, ill-timed, and unsuccessful movement. The reader will do well to bear in mind that though the temptation to enlarge upon such an unprecedented event as the sack of part of London must have been great, there is no word in the latest recension of this poem to describe, praise or condemn the movement of Wat Tyler, John Straw, or the Rev. John Ball. Most editors explain this allusion-silence of the last recension by saying the poet was afraid, in consequence of the reaction following, to refer to the uprising of the people; I would rather see in his abjuration of revolt, in his failure to describe the revolt, a continuation of the attitude always adopted by him, that what England needed was a change of heart and not an exchange of purses. The hateful relapses into savagery which marked the Jacquerie, the French Revolution, and the lynching states of to-day

would be to him the negation of the spirit of *Piers Plowman*, and the throwing away of all that men of all classes have laboriously acquired in the domain of legislation, self-government, and self-control. Thus I hold, while admiring greatly the historical novel called *Long Will*, that the talented authoress, Miss Florence Converse, has erred in her interpretation of the part played by the author and his poem in the troublesome days and awful scenes which marked the year 1381.

And if one is uncertain about the exact date of composition, we are still more in doubt as to the authorship. The poem is attributed variously to Robert or William Langland of Cleobury Mortimer and to William Langley; but no outside allusion of any importance save that of tradition tells us who the writer was. We gather his biography, if it can so be called, from his work. The humorous description of himself occurring only in one text may have been added at any date and by any chantry priest or other person, and it is impossible to say what he means by it; and this section, the fable of the rats, the long additions which follow Gods bull of pardon, and the interludes of the Harrowing of Hell and the Coming of Antichrist, seem to the present editor to point to the composite character of the authorship, a composite character strongly maintained by Professor Manly and denied by Jusserand. It is often forgotten that when a poem dealing with social miseries is produced it may be made a vehicle to represent the feelings and aspirations of thousands more than the author; and that when in addition it becomes popular and is written in an easily imitable form, many hands, authorised and unauthorised, set to work to help, alter, continue, strengthen, weaken, and enlarge. One thinks instinctively of the Book of Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah, the plays of Shakespeare, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, the Wiclit Bible, the Anglo-Saxon Gospels, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, all of which were (and some of which are still) assigned to one individual author or editor, though criticism has in nearly every case disputed the absolute claims set up for David, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Wiclit, Alfred, and Homer respectively. Such a composite authorship, I think, is the only thing that will account for the almost senseless "improvements" which we con-

tinually meet with in the latest text: and I believe that a careful comparative study of the texts themselves will do more to clear up difficulties than any reasoning from history or allusion. Such study the poem has not yet received. The metre and dialect have received fullest attention; but they yield more information about the scribes than about the author. Yet the scribes themselves may have been the chief offenders.

If we try to reconstruct from a careful reading what manner of man or men penned these visions, we might arrive at some picture like the following. They were or he was a man who loved the country for its birds and flowers, but loved London better for its people; who had been to school and read and remembered eagerly and lovingly, with greater intelligence than care, the Latin Bible and the Latin Fathers; who lived a precarious, poor, tramping life of mass or chantry priest, earning little and continually consorting, partly by choice and partly by necessity, in the most intimate way, with friars, theologians, merchants, pilgrims, beggars, drunkards, loose women, and with the honest and hard-working poor; who knew all the tricks of shop and cheaping, of mendicancy and mendacity; who was not averse from honest idleness, and who was stung to penitence and indignation by what he saw, heard, and felt in himself and in those around him; who hated the trickery, the aristocracy, and intricacies of law which he did not understand, and who loved the scenes in the gentleman's dining-hall and in the taverns, where he was quite at home; who abhorred—perhaps with envy—the easy life of the rich noble and the fat priest; who by his reading, his monastic training, and his own poverty imagined that the saviour of society would come from and belong to the only class he thoroughly understood; who wrote roughly the rough alliterative verse, indigenous to the land and very pedestrian, but who in his inspired hours, which were many, almost rose, notwithstanding his awkward tools, to the spiritual heights of Bunyan and Shelley and to the poetic heights of the Old Testament prophets. Like Bunyan and Shelley, he lived in stormy times; like them, he had, as an individual, been through some of the moral cataclysms of which he spoke; like them, he was prone to fall, but ready to rise; but he did not use the nervous

beauty of Bunyans prose or the metaphysical wings of Shelleys scholarship, strengthened by his unearthly and Titanic force. This, however, was his advantage, for his work was capable of being enlarged and successfully imitated. For he wrote for the ordinary man, who, whether he be king or baron, bishop or pardoner, merchant or Lombard, hermit or pilgrim, knight or knave, may, if his heart counsel him, echo the last words:

“I will become a pilgrim,  
And wend as wide as the world lasteth  
To seek—Piers Plowman.”

ARTHUR BURRELL.

ISLEWORTH, January 1, 1912.

#### USEFUL BOOKS

Professor Skeat's edition of *Piers Plowman*. 2 vols.

J. Jusserand, *L'épopée Mystique* (the book has been translated).

Professor Manly's chapter and bibliography in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.

Black Letter editions of the Poem (British Museum).

Trevelyan's *England in the Times of Wyclif*.

Cutts' *Scenes of the Middle Ages*.

Florence Converse, historical novel, *Long Will*.

Riley's *Illustrations of London Life from Original Documents*.

Bishop Stubbs' *Christ in English Literature*.

Much interesting matter will be found in pamphlets and magazines.

These can be identified *s.v.* Langland or Plowman, or in the bibliographies of Periodical Literature in the British Museum.

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To all who understand or would understand

## PIERS PLOWMAN

I saw myself, a youth, almost a boy, in a low-pitched wooden church. The slim wax candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints. There stood before me many people, all fair-haired peasant heads. From time to time they began swaying, falling, rising again, like the ripe ears of wheat when the wind in summer passes over them. All at once a man came up from behind and stood beside me. I did not turn towards him, but I felt that the man was Christ. Emotion, curiosity, awe, overmastered me. I made an effort and looked at my neighbour. A face like everyones, a face like all mens faces. The eyes looked a little upward, quietly and intently; the lips closed, not compressed; the upper lip as it were resting on the other; a small beard parted in two; the hands folded and still; and the clothes on him like everyones.

"What sort of Christ is this?" I thought. "Such an ordinary, ordinary man. It cannot be." I turned away, but I had hardly turned my eyes from this ordinary man when I felt again that it was really none other than Christ standing beside me. Suddenly my heart sank and I came to myself. Only then I realised that just such a face is the face of Christ—a face like all mens faces.

Turgeniev.

I wente forth wyde-where      walkynge myn one  
In a wyde wyldernessee.

THE VISION  
OF THE  
FIELD FULL OF FOLK



# PIERS PLOWMAN

## THE VISION OF THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK<sup>1</sup>

IN a summer season,  
In rough cloth I robed me,  
In habit like a hermit  
And through the wide world I went, wonders to hear.

But on a May morning,  
A marvel befel me  
I had wandered me weary,  
On a broad bank  
And as I lay and leaned  
I slumbered in a sleeping,  
And I dreamed—marvellously.

All the worlds weal,  
Truth and trickery,  
All I saw, sleeping.

I was in a wilderness,  
And eastward I looked  
I saw a Tower on an hill,  
Beneath it a Dell,  
With deep ditches and dark  
And Death and wicked spirits  
And all between,

when soft was the sun,  
as I a shepherd were,  
in his works unholy,  
And through the wide world I went, wonders to hear.

on Malvern hills,  
—sure from Faery it came—  
so weary, I rested me  
by a merry-sounding burn;  
and looked into the waters  
it rippled so merrily,

all the worlds woe,  
treason and guile,

wist I not where,  
against the sun.  
fairly fashioned,  
and in the Dell a dungeon,  
and dreadful to see,  
dwelt therein,  
between the Hill and Dungeon,

### A FAIR FIELD

### FULL OF FOLK

<sup>1</sup> Readers are referred to the Comment (p. 179) and to the Index for further explanatory matter regarding the poem.

Rich and poor,  
Working and wandering

all manner of men,  
as in the world we must.

Some were for ploughing,  
Set their seed and sowed their  
seed,  
To win what wastrels

and played full seldom,  
and sweated hard,  
with gluttony destroy.

Some were for pride,

in parade of apparel.

Some were for prayers and  
penance,  
Living strait lives  
In hope of heavenly bliss,  
Anchorites, hermits,  
And coveted not to roam  
Nor with dainty living

ay, many a one,  
for love of our Lord

that held in their cells,  
the country side and beg,  
their body to please.

Some chose merchandise;

they throve the best.

And some were for music,  
Gold getting, gleeful,

the music of minstrels,  
in an innocent heart.

But jesters and janglers,  
Feigning their fancies,  
With wit enough to work,  
Paul preacheth about them  
**Be that speaketh filtbily**

Judas children,  
and fooling the crowds,  
if work they would,  
—no more will I say—  
is the Devils man.

There were tramps and beggars  
Crammed with bread  
Lying for their food,  
Going to bed in gluttony,  
Gangs of mean thieves.  
Sleep and sorry sloth

fast about flitting,  
in wallet and belly,  
and fighting in the taverns,  
rising from bed in ribaldry,

pursue them ever.

Pilgrims and palmers

plighted together,

To seek S. James in Spain,  
They went upon their way  
And had leave to lie  
I saw some of them,

Each told a different tale  
Their tongues tuned to lying,

Hermits, a heap of them,  
Were walking to Walsingham

Great long lubbers,  
Clad in copes  
To pass for hermits,

Friars? All the four orders,  
Preaching to the people,  
For their own profit.

Many of these masters  
Money and their preaching  
Gods love has turned trader,  
And we in few years  
If Gods love and the Church  
The greatest mischief in the  
world

Look there, a Pardoner,  
A papal bull he brought,  
He can assoil them all,

The simple fools believed him,  
Came and knelt  
He bunched his "letters" in  
their faces  
And his parchment roll robbed  
them

and S. Peter in Rome;  
with many a wise tale,  
all their life after.

O, they had gone the pil-  
grimage,  
—every one a lie—  
and not to truth.

with hooked staves,  
—each had his wench with  
him—  
that loth were to work,  
to be known for hermits,  
and have an easy life.

I found them there,  
and glosing the gospel

may dress as they will,  
soon meet one another.  
and the rich pay high,  
have seen wonderful things.  
do not cut down such Friars,

will mount up full fast.

preaching like a priest,  
sealed by the bishop,  
of fasting, falsehood, and of  
broken vows.

loved his words,  
and kissed his bull,  
and blinded their eyes,  
of rings and brooches.

Thus, men, ye give your gold  
And lend it to loafers

to keep gluttons going,  
that follow lechery.

If the bishop were holy  
He would not send his seal  
But against the bishop  
For the parson and the Par-  
doner  
Which the parish poor would  
get

and worth both his ears,  
to deceive the people,  
your Pardoner preaches not,  
share the sermon-silver,  
if the Pardoner were away.

Some parish priests  
The parish was poor  
Praying for licence  
And sing masses for souls

complained to the bishop,  
since the Great Pestilence,  
in London to dwell,  
for silver is sweet.

Bishops and deacons,  
With cures under Christ  
Who ought to shrive their  
people  
They lie in London,

masters and doctors,  
and tonsured to show it,  
and pray and feed their flocks,  
in Lent, ay, all the year;

Some serve the king,  
In the Court of Chancery,  
They claim his debts,

collecting his moneys,  
in the wards and ward-motes,  
his dues of waifs and strays.

Conscience accused them,  
“ Ye suffer idolatry  
“ And bring your iron-bound  
boxes  
“ Many a wax candle hangs  
“ But all the world knows well,  
“ It profiteth your purses  
“ That men should live and die  
“ And all the world is worse

and the commons heard it,  
in many sundry places,  
to take the untrue tolls.  
as record of a miracle,  
that miracle is none.  
and ye prelates suffer it  
and believe—in their ignor-  
ance.  
for this your covetise.”

*(The writer digresses)*

What trouble and mischance  
 Through two false priests,  
 They were discomfited  
 And for Eli saw them sin  
 And chastened them not  
 As it was prophesied,  
 And Elis sons were slain.  
 From his chair where he sat  
 And brake his neck a-two.  
 All this was Gods vengeance,  
 And, since they were priests  
 God was the angrier

fell on free Israel,  
 Ophni and Phineas.  
 and lost the ark of God,  
 and suffered their evil,  
 and would not rebuke them,  
 —the ark of God was lost,  
 he fell, for sorrow  
 he beat not his children,  
 and men of Holy Church,  
 and sooner took his vengeance.

Therefore ye priests and  
Churchmen

Ye who should their fathers be  
 God shall take vengeance,  
 Than ever on Eli,  
 For your wicked tolerance,  
 Your mass and your mattins  
 Are done undevoutly;  
 Christ in *his* consistory

who let men worship idols,  
 and teach them better,  
 harder and greater  
 on Ophni and on Phineas,  
 and your own sins.  
 and many of your Hours  
 I dread me at the last  
 will curse many of you.

I know well the power  
 To bind and unbind,  
 He left the power, with love,  
 Cardinal virtues,  
 Heavens gates, where Christ dwelleth.  
 But of court cardinals  
 Presuming of themselves  
 And holding the power  
 I will not deny it them,  
 Lieth the great election of a Pope.

that Peter had to keep,  
 as the Book telleth.  
 to the four virtues  
 for they close the gates,  
 taking the name of cardinal,  
 a Pope to make,  
 that Peter had,  
 for in love and learning

“ Speak not against it,” saith  
 Conscience,

“ for Holy Church sake.”

*(The narrative proceeds)*

Then came a king  
The power of the people  
Then came Common Sense  
That Common Sense and  
knighthood  
Should see that the people  
With Common Sense the people  
And for profit of all men  
To till and work,  
To live their day with loyal  
work  
Then looked up a lean lunatic  
“ Christ keep thee, sir king,  
“ And grant thee so to rule,  
“ And thou, for thy righteous  
rule,  
Then bent an angel down,  
Who cannot jangle in the courts  
But they must serve and suffer,  
He spake to the clergy and the king.  
“ King and a Prince art thou,  
“ To=morrow nothing ;  
“ Thou that of Christ the King  
“ Dost keep the way,  
“ Be just, show mercy,  
“ And carry out His will.  
“ Mercy is justice still,  
“ Sow and reap mercy.”

knighthood went before him,  
made him to reign.  
and made clerks and learned  
men  
and the king together,  
might gain a living.  
contrived every craft,  
set apart plowmen,  
as true life asketh,  
while life and land remain.  
and knelt and said,  
thee and thy kingdom,  
that loyalty may love thee  
find thy reward in heaven.”

and spake for the poors sake,  
and plead their cause aright,  
for their sakes he said it,  
a glutton of words

If the King keep not the Law  
He is the name—but not the thing.

And all the people cried  
 The precepts of the King  
 These be our bond of law.

Then ran a rout of rats  
 And came to a council  
 For a Court Cat  
 Leapt among them lightly,  
 Perilously played with them  
 "We dare not look up," said  
 they,  
 "And if we grumble at his  
 games  
 "Scratch us and claw us  
 "We loathe our life  
 "If we with any wit  
 "We might be lords on earth

A rat of renown  
 Told them a sovran cure.  
 "I have seen great dogs  
 "Wearing collars, brigh<sup>t</sup> gold,  
 "Necklaces of crafty work.  
 "Uncoupled they wend,  
 "Were a bell on the collar  
 "Therefore," the rat says,  
 "We should buy a brass bell  
 "And set it on a collar  
 "And hang it on the cats neck.  
 "When he rides, when he rests,  
 "And if he list to play  
 "And appear in his presence  
 "And if he be wroth,

All this rout of rats  
 But when the bell was bought

to the Council in Latin

and small mice with them,  
 for profit of them all.  
 came when he would  
 caught them as he would,  
 and posseed them about.

" for dread of divers fears,  
 he will grieve us all,  
 and take us in his paws.  
 until he let us be.  
 his power might withstand,  
 and live as we would."

ready of tongue  
 in cities and in towns  
 all about their necks,  
 They go where they will,  
 through warren and waste;  
 men might know them—and  
 run.

" reason sheweth me  
 or of bright silver,  
 for profit of us all,  
 Then can we hear  
 or when he runs to play.  
 then we may look  
 while he *will* play.  
 beware and shun his paths."

to this reason assented,  
 and on a collar hung,

Was no rat in the rout  
 That durst have bound the bell  
 And they held themselves  
 cowards  
 And their labour lost.

A mouse that knew much  
 "Though we kill the Cat  
 "To snatch us and our kind,  
 "Therefore my counsel is,  
 "And be never so bold  
 "For I heard my sire say,  
 "Where the cat is a kitten  
 "Holy Writ witnesseth.

Who to thee thou land whose king is a child.—*Solomon.*  
 "For me," quoth the mouse,  
 "Never shall cat or kitten  
 "Nor should men prate of  
 collars.  
 "For though it cost me dear,  
 "And suffer the Cat  
 "Mischief that chastens many  
 "Were the Cat and his kittens  
 "We mice would eat up  
 "Ye rats would waken men that rest;  
 "If ye had your will  
 What this rat-dream meaneth  
 Divine it—I dare not—

There wandered a hundred,  
 Serjeants they seemed,  
 Pleading the Law,  
 Unlocking their lips never  
 Thou mightest better mete the  
 mist  
 Than get a mutter from their mouths—save thou show thy  
 money.

for all the realm of France,  
 about the cats neck.  
 and their counsel feeble  
 stood forth and said:  
 yet another should come  
 though we crept under benches.  
 LET THE CAT BE,  
 to show him the bell,  
 seven years ago,  
 the Court is full ailing

"I see so much to come  
 by my counsel be hurt  
 I would never buy collar  
 I would hold my counsel  
 to do as he will.  
 will teach the Cat better.  
 not ready to spring on us,  
 many a mans malt,  
 yourselves ye could not rule."  
 ye merry men,  
 by dear God in heaven.

in hoods of silk,  
 and served at the Bar,  
 for pennies and for pounds,  
 for love of our Lord.  
 on Malvern hills  
 Than get a mutter from their mouths—save thou show thy

I saw bold bishops  
Made clerks of accounts  
Deacons and archdeacons,  
Who should preach to the  
people  
They leapt away to London  
To be clerks of the Kings  
Bench

and bachelors of divinity  
to serve the king,  
men full of dignity,  
and feed the poor,  
(their bishops gave them leave  
and to despoil the land.

Yet I dreamed more,  
Barons and burgesses,  
I saw in this assembly,  
Many a butcher, baker, brewer,  
Woolweavers, linenweavers,  
Masons and miners  
Ditchers and delvers,  
And spend the livelong day in  
song,  
Cooks and their men were crying,  
“ Good pork, good goose;  
Taverners told the same tale,  
“ White wine, red wine,

of mean men and of rich,  
bondmen of villages;  
as ye shall hear after,  
tailors and tinkers,  
toll-takers in the markets,  
and many another craft,  
that do their work ill,

“ God save you, Lady Em.”  
“ Pies hot, all hot,  
Come, come and dine.”  
“ A drink of wine for nothing,  
to wash the roast meat down.”

All this I saw sleeping,

nay, seven times more.



THE VISION  
OF HOLY CHURCH



# THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

WHAT this mountain meaneth  
And the FIELD FULL OF  
FOLK

A lady lovely to look on,  
Came from that castle down;  
" Will, sleepest thou? " she cried,  
" How busy they be  
" The greater part  
" Have their heaven here,  
" Of other heaven but this

I was afeard of her face,  
" My lady, " said I,

" The Tower on the hill,  
" O would that ye wrought  
" He is Faiths father,  
" He gave you five senses  
" Therefore he biddeth earth  
" With wool, with linen,  
" In moderate measure  
" He of his courtesy  
" Things three, no more;  
" The one is clothing,  
" The one is meat,  
" The third is drink when thou  
driest  
" Lest thou be the worse

" Lot in his lifeday  
" Wickedly wrought

and the dark dale  
fairly I shall show.  
all in linen clad,  
" Seest thou this people,  
in the medley and the maze?  
that pass upon this earth  
they wish no other;  
keep they no reckoning."

fair though she was;  
" what meaneth it all? "

Truth liveth therein,  
as his word teacheth you.  
he formed you all;  
wherewith to serve him.  
to help you each one  
with needful livelihood,  
that ye may be at ease.  
set for common use  
but three are needful.  
to save thee from chill,  
for thy health sake,

but none out of reason  
when thou shouldst work.

did a lecherous deed,  
and wrathed God Almighty,

“ And all that wicked deed  
 “ Through wine and women  
 “ Dread the delight of drink  
 “ Though thou long for more,  
 “ What the belly asketh  
 “ What the soul loveth

“ Trust not thy body,  
 “ The lying wretched world  
 “ The Fiend and thy flesh  
 “ This one and that  
 “ And whisper evil to thy  
 heart.

“ My lady, thanks,” quoth I,  
 “ But tell me, my lady,  
 “ That men so closely love,

“ Go to the Gospel,  
 “ When with a penny  
 “ Should they with the penny  
 “ And God them asked  
 “ And the image also  
 “ ‘ Of Cæsar,’ said they,  
 “ ‘ Render to Cæsar,’ quoth he,  
 “ ‘ And what is Gods to God;

he laid—on wine;  
 was Lot snared.  
 and thou shalt do the better.  
 Measure is Medicine.  
 is not all good for the ghost,  
 is not all food for the body.

a liar is his teacher,  
 that would thee betray,  
 follow hard after thee,  
 pursue thy soul,

Therefore, beware.”

“ thy teaching I like well,  
 of the money of this world  
 to whom belongeth it? ”

hear what God said,  
 they posed him in the Temple.  
 honour King Cæsar?  
 of whom the letters spake  
 that stood upon the coin.  
 ‘ we know that well enough.’  
 ‘ that that Cæsars is,  
 else ye do ill.’

should rule you all,  
 your wealth to keep,  
 and give it you at need.  
 all go together.”

“ Right fully reason  
 “ And Common Sense your  
 warden be  
 “ To be banker of your treasure  
 “ Reason, Thrift and Common  
 Sense

Then I would know of her,  
 “ The deep dark val  
 “ Beseech thee, my lady,

for His sake that made her,  
 so dreadful to see,  
 what may *this* mean? ”

“ Care Castle,” said she,  
 “ May curse that he was born  
 “ Therein one dwelleth,  
 “ Father of falseness,  
 “ He egged to evil  
 “ He counselled Cain  
 “ He cheated Judas  
 “ And hung him on the elder tree.  
 “ He is a love-hinderer,  
 “ Who trust in earthly treasure,

Then I wondered in my wit  
 That such wise words  
 And by the High Name I asked  
 Who she was certainly

“ Holy Church am I,” quoth  
 she,  
 “ I took thee in my arms first  
 “ To me thou broughtest  
 sureties  
 “ All thy life long

Then I kneeled down  
 And prayed her piteously  
 And eek to teach me kindly  
 That I might work His will  
 “ Teach me no treasure-gaining  
 “ Thou that art called a saint,

“ When all treasures are tried,  
 “ GOD IS LOVE.  
 “ It is as dear a treasure  
 “ This tells thee Truth.  
 “ For he who is True with his  
 tongue,

“ he that cometh therein  
 a body and a soul;  
 whose name is Wrong,  
 he framed it himself;  
 Adam and Eve,  
 to kill his brother,  
 with Jewish silver,  
 he lieth to all  
 where Truth is not.”

what woman she might be,  
 from Holy Writ showed me,  
 to tell me ere she went,  
 that counselled me, that taught  
 me.

“ thou oughtest me to know.  
 I made thee free.

to do all my bidding  
 to love me, to believe me.”

and cried her grace,  
 to pray for my sins,  
 on Christ to believe,  
 who made me man:  
 but tell me this,  
 how may I save my soul? ”

TRUTH IS THE BEST.  
 To this text I appeal.  
 as dear God himself;

True with his hands,

“ Working True works there-  
with,

“ He is a god, the gospel says,

“ And by S. Lukes words

“ The learned know it

“ For Christians and un-  
Christians

“ Kings and knights  
“ Righteously roaming  
“ Taking transgressors,  
“ Till Truth determine  
“ David in his day  
“ And made them swear on  
    the sword

“ That is the plain profession

“ *And not to fast on Friday*

“ But to serve him or her

“ And never to leave them

“ The knight that doth it not

“ His duty is not to fast

“ But faithfully defend

“ When God began heaven  
“ He made knights in his courts,  
“ Cherubim, Seraphim,  
“ Lucifer loveliest,  
“ He was an archangel,  
“ But he brake his obedience  
“ And from that fellowship,  
“ Fell to deep hell  
“ More thousands with him  
“ Leapt with Lucifer  
“ For they believed him and his lying words:

¶ shall sit in the sides of the north: like ¶ shall be to  
the highest.”

and wishing ill to none,  
in earth and heaven,  
like to our Lord.

and should teach it every-  
where,

claim to be taught the Truth.

should keep the Truth,  
the realm around,  
tying them fast,  
their trespass to the end.  
dubbed his knights

to serve Truth ever;  
belonging unto knights,  
*for a hundred years*,  
that asketh for the Truth,  
for money or for favour.  
is traitor to his order;  
and not to doff his shirt,  
and fight for Truth.

in the great bliss of it,  
creatures ten,  
seven more and one other,  
next to our Lord.  
one of Gods knights,  
and lost his bliss,  
in a Fiends likeness,  
to dwell evermore.  
than man could number  
in loathly form

¶ shall sit in the sides of the north: like ¶ shall be to  
the highest.”

(*The writer speaks*)

Lord, why should he then  
Leap to the north  
Were it not for northern folk  
But I blame none.  
Safer by far is it

the wretched Lucifer  
and abide not in the sun?  
I could you tell  
where the sun reigneth.

And where the fiend flew  
Where he is hell is  
And over against him—Christ.

he failed and fell  
and he there bound

(*The narrative proceeds*)

“ Then fell he and his fellows,  
“ Out of heaven into hell  
“ Some in air are, some on  
    earth,  
“ And all that work wrong  
“ Shall wend to him  
“ But they that work well,  
“ Eastward to heaven shall go,  
“ Where is the throne of Truth.  
“ Teach it to the simple  
“ TRUTH IS TREASURE

they turned to fiends,  
fast they hobbled,  
some in deep hell,  
after their death-day  
and dwell with that shrew.  
as Holy Writ telleth,  
there to abide  
the learned know it well,  
the best tried on earth.”

“ Nay, but I know not,”  
    quoth I,

“ ye must teach me better.  
“ How doth Truth grow in me?

“ Thou doted daff,  
“ Little Latin hast thou learnt in the days of thy youth.”  
~~Woe for my barren youth days spent in vain.~~  
“ Thou knowest, well enough. To love the Lord  
“ And rather than do deadly sin to die.  
~~Better die than live ill.~~

“ This is Truth, I trow,  
“ Suffer him to tell thee

whoso can teach thee better  
and learn *his* lesson;

"Truth telleth thee that Love is the treacle of sin,  
 "A sovran salve for body and soul.  
 "Love is the plant of Peace, most precious of the virtues,  
 "Heaven could not hold it, so heavy was Love,  
 "Till it had of this earth eaten its fill;  
 "Then never lighter was a leaf  
 "Than Love was when it took upon a linden tree,  
 "Fluttering, piercing the flesh and blood of man.  
 "No armour may it stay, as a needles point,  
 nor no high walls.

"Therefore is Love the leader of the Lords folk in heaven  
 "And, as a mayor, a mediator between the king and people.  
 "Right so Love shapes the law  
 on man for his misdeeds,  
 "Love lays on man the payment due.  
 "In thy hearts conscience, in the deep well of thee,  
 "In thy heart and in thy head the mighty Truth is born;  
 "That was the Fathers deed, that formed us all,  
 "And looked on us with love, and let his Son die  
 "Meekly for our misdeeds.  
 "And yet Christ willed no woe on them that wrought him  
 "With his meek mouth pain,  
 "For pity on the people he prayed for mercy,  
 that pained him to his death.

"Therefore I counsel you, ye have pity on the poor,  
 rich,  
 "Though ye be mighty at the be ye meek in your deeds;  
 law wrong or right,  
 "The same measure ye mete,  
 "Ye shall be weighed therewith when ye go hence.

"Though thou be true tongued, though thou trade honestly,  
 "And be innocent as a wean that weepeth at its christening,  
 "Save thou love loyally, and lend to the poor,

“ And share with him in godly  
wise

“ Your Masses and your Hours

“ Than slut Malkyns maiden-  
head

“ James the gentle

“ Faith without fact

“ As dead as a door-tree

**Faith without works is dead.**

“ Chastity without charity

“ It is but as an unlighted lamp.

“ Many chaplains are chaste,

“ There are no harder, hungrier  
men

“ None more avarous than they

“ Unkind to kinsmen

“ They eat up their ‘ charity ’

“ Many parish priests

“ But, cumbered with covetise,

“ So close hath avarice

“ Avarice is no virtue,

“ It teaches the lay people

“ Therefore in the gospel

**Give and it shall be given to you;** I gave you all.

“ This is the key of love,

“ To comfort the sorrowful

“ Love is the leech of life,

“ It is the graft of grace,

“ Therefore I say to thee,

“ All treasures tried,

“ Love it,” quoth she,

“ Learning thee what Love is,”

Gods gifts to *thee*,

bring you no more merit

that none desireth.

said in his writings,

is nothing worth,

unless deeds follow.

**Faith without works is dead.**

lies chained in hell,

but where is their charity?

than men of Holy Church,

when they are set on high,  
and to all Christian souls,  
and grumble for more.

are clean in body,

they cannot drive it forth,  
clasped them together,  
it is hell treachery,  
ungenerously to give,  
these words be written,

**Give and it shall be given to you;** I gave you all.

it openeth Gods grace,

that are with sin entangled.

next to our Lord,

it is the nearest road to  
heaven.

“ Therefore I say to thee,

“ All treasures tried,

“ Love it,” quoth she,

“ Learning thee what Love is,”

**TRUTH IS THE BEST;**

“ no longer may I stay

and with that she left me.



THE VISION OF LADY MEED  
AND OF HER  
MARRIAGE TO FALSEHOOD



## THE VISION OF LADY MEED

YET kneeled I on my knees,  
" Mercy, my lady,  
" That bare the blissful Child,  
" By some craft teach me

" Look on thy left hand,  
" Falsehood and Flattery,

I looked on my left hand,  
And was ware of a woman,  
Her robe fur-edged,  
Crowned with a crown,  
Fairly her fingers  
And in the rings red rubies,  
And diamonds of dearest price,  
Sapphires and beryls

Her rich robe  
Her ribbons set with gold,  
Her array ravished me;  
I wondered who she was,

" What is this woman," said I,  
Quoth she, " That is Meed the  
maid;  
" She hath slandered my love  
" And belied her to lords  
" In the Popes palace,

and cried her grace,  
for Marys love of heaven,  
who bought us on the Rood,  
to know the False."

lo, where he standeth,  
and many of their friends."

as the Lady told me,  
wonderly clad,  
the finest on earth,  
the king hath no better,  
were fretted with rings,  
as red as a furnace,  
and double sapphires,  
poison to destroy.

of scarlet dye,  
red gold, rare stones;  
such riches saw I never;  
and whose wife she were.

" so wonderly clad?"

she oft hath harmed me,  
that is named Loyalty,  
that have the laws to keep.  
she is private as I,

“ But Truth would not have

it so,

“ Falsehood her father is

“ That, since he came to earth,

“ And Meed is mannered after

him,

Like father, like son : Every good tree maketh good fruits.

“ I should be higher than she,

“ My father, the Great God,

“ One God without beginning,

“ He gave me Mercy

“ Any man that is merciful

“ Shall be my lord and I his

love

“ And he that taketh Meed to  
wife,

“ Shall lose for love of her

“ How speaketh David King

“ And of men on the earth

“ And of the way to safety?

Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle ? etc.

“ And now will Meed be  
wedded

“ False Fickle-Tongue,

“ Flattery with his fair speech

“ And Liar brought it about,

“ There shalt thou know

“ That belong to the lordship

“ Blame them not, let them be,

“ Till Honesty punish;

“ I leave thee to Christ,

“ Be thou but good

for Meed is a bastard,

with fickle tongue,

never said sooth,

as nature will.

Like father, like son : Every good tree maketh good fruits.

of better stock I came,

ground of all grace,

and I his good daughter.

that I might marry him.

and loves me true

in the high heaven;

I wager my head,

a heap of Gods charity.

of men that take Meed,

who maintain the truth,

The Psalter beareth witness:

Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle ? etc.

all to a cursèd shrew,

begotten of a fiend.

this people hath enchanted

and to-morrow is the bridal.

the small and the great

of Flattery and Meed.

keep thy tongue still,

then say thy say.

and his clean mother,

and save thee from Covetise.”

Then my lady left me

And dreaming I beheld

lying there asleep

## THE MARRIAGE OF MEED

When she had gone from me  
 All the rich retinue,  
 Were bidden to the bridal,  
 Knights, clerks and commons,  
 Sheriffs and sheriffs men,  
 Middlemen, brokers,  
 No reckoning the rout

They sent Simony  
 That Falsehood and Flattery  
 To make them over  
 There was no hall nor house  
 And EVERY FIELD WAS FULL OF FOLK.

On a mountain, in midst of it,  
 They pitched a proud pavilion,  
 For knights from afar  
 For jurors, for summoners,  
 For the flattering Friars,  
 That all might witness  
 When Meed was married to Falsehood.

Simony, Law and Juryman  
 But Flattery was the first  
 To give her away  
 When Simony and Lawyer  
 They assented thereto

Then leaped out Liar,  
 " That Guile with great oaths  
 And Simony and Lawyer  
 Unfolding the deed  
 Thus they began,  
 Know all men by these presents . . .  
 " Witness all men

I looked and beheld  
 whose root is false-living,  
 poor and rich,  
 jurymen and summoners,  
 beadlees and bailiffs,  
 victuallers, pleaders;  
 that ran at Meeds heels.

to seal the papers,  
 for their fines held,  
 Meeds dowry for ever.  
 that could harbour the people,

at mid-morning tide,  
 and ten thousand tents,  
 and for strange comers,  
 for labourers on farms,  
 all the Four Orders,  
 what the writing said,

were Meeds nearest friends,  
 to fetch her from her bower,  
 and join her to Falsehood.  
 saw their desire,  
 —at Silvers prayer.

" A charter, a charter,  
 hath given them both."  
 stood forth both of them  
 that Falsehood had writ;  
 and loud they cried:  
 dwelling on the earth,

" Meed is here married,  
 " But—for her goods.  
 " Falsehood loveth her,  
 " Flattery Fickle-speech  
 " To be princes in pride,  
 " To backbite, to boast,  
 " To scorn men, to scold  
     men,  
 " To be bold to disobey,  
 " With the kingdom of Covetise  
 " With the island of Usury,  
 " Gluttony and Oaths  
 " To serve the devil  
 " I grant possession  
 " Of the earldom of Envy  
 " I grant them all.

" Bargain and brokerage,  
 " All that lordship of Lechery,  
 " In its words, its works,  
 " In its raiment, its longings,  
 " When lust willeth,

Gluttony gave them,  
 To drink the long day  
 To jangle and jest,

To eat on fast-days,  
 And sit and sup  
 To breed like town swine  
 To wake in despair  
 " (They shall think they be  
     lost,  
 " To have and to hold  
 " A home with the devil,  
 " With all the appurtenance  
 " To dwell in woe with Satan

not for virtue nor rank,  
 for he knoweth her riches,  
 granteth the pair—  
 to despise poverty,  
 to bear false witness,  
 to beget slanders,  
 to break the Commandments,  
 and all the coasts about,  
 I crown these two.  
 I give them as their own,  
 with all delights and lusts.  
 in Sloths service  
 and the Castle of Strife;

and the borough of Theft,  
 its length and breadth,  
 its watching eyes,  
 its idle thoughts,  
 and flesh at last faileth."

and swore it with oaths,  
 at divers taverns,  
 and judge their fellow-  
     Christians,  
 to feast before the hour,  
 till sleep came over them,  
 to be slothful and sleek,  
 with no will to do better:

this is the end of them;)  
 and their heirs after them  
 and be damned for ever,  
 of purgatory and hell,  
 while God is in heaven."

In witness of this,  
 Peter the Pardoner  
 Bett the Bucks beadle,  
 Mund the Miller,  
*Dated—the Devil,*  
*Witness Parson Simony,*

Wrong signed first,  
 of Crutched Friars,  
 Reynold the reeve,  
 and many another,  
 this deed I seal,  
 Lawyer agreeing.

## (THEOLOGY PROTESTS)

Then answered Theology  
 “ Sorrow upon thee,  
 “ For Meed is a lady,  
 “ Though Falsehood her father  
     was,  
 “ And save Amends consent  
 “ God granteth Meed to Truth,  
 “ Thou hast given her to Guile,  
 “ The text telleth not so;  
 The labourer is worthy of his *Meed*.

“ I, Theology, know  
 “ Lying on the gridiron  
 “ Looked up and cried to God,  
 “ ‘ For I, man, of thy mercy  
 “ And since a man may in  
     heaven  
 “ It seemeth right on earth

“ All by lies thou livest  
 “ Simony and thou  
 “ The lawyers and ye  
 “ Ye shall abide it dear  
 “ Well ye know, ye liars,  
 “ That Falsehood is faithless  
 “ Beelzebubs bastard,  
 “ And might kiss the king  
 “ Work ye by wisdom

and said to Lawyer:  
 to bring about such wedding,  
 daughter of Amends,

Amends was her mother,  
 she may not be wedded.

God give thee sorrow,  
 Truth knoweth sooth  
*Meed*.

how Laurence the Levite  
 near unto death,  
 ‘ Open heavens gates,  
 have deserved MEED; ’

merit MEED of God  
 to wed MEED to Truth.

and lecherous works.  
 shame Holy Church;  
 hurt the people;  
 by God that made me;  
 if your wits are worth aught,  
 and fickle in works,  
 and Meed a high-born maiden  
 as his cousin if she would.  
 and by common sense,

“ And lead her to London  
 “ If any law will let them  
 “ Ay, though any judges judge  
 “ Yet beware of wedding them,  
 “ And Conscience is with him  
 “ If he find you at fault  
 “ It shall at the last

To this Civil Law agreed  
 Nor yet the lawyers

Then Flattery fetched florins,  
 And bade Guile give  
 To the lawyers in special,  
 And bade him fee Falsewitness  
 “ He can win Meed over

When this gold was given  
 To Falsehood and Flattery  
 And men came and comforted  
 “ Sure, sir, we shall not cease  
 “ For we have mastered Meed  
 “ She is ready to go  
 “ To see if Law will join you  
 two

Then was Falsehood merry  
 And every man summoned  
 And bid them be ready,  
 To wend with them to West-  
 minster,

where law is given,  
 lie together;  
 she may be joined to False-  
 hood,  
 —Wise is the Truth;  
 and knoweth each one of you,  
 and by falsehood holden,  
 press sore on your souls.”

but not Sir Simony,  
 —till silver had changed hands.

florins in heaps,  
 gold all about,  
 “ that none of them fail us,”  
 with florins enow;  
 and bring her to my will.”

great thankings were made  
 for their fair gifts,  
 Falsehood.  
 till Meed be thy wedded wife,  
 by our merry talk.  
 with a good will to London,

in joy for evermore.”  
 and Flattery blithe,  
 in all shires about,  
 poor and rich,  
 to witness this deed.

### (THE JOURNEY TO WESTMINSTER)

Then looked they for horses  
 Yet hacks had they none  
 But Guile began to borrow

to carry them thither,  
 save hacks that were hired,  
 from many a great lord,

And Flattery brought out  
He set Meed on a sheriff,  
Falsehood on a juryman,  
Flattery on a flatterer,

foals of the best;  
shod all new,  
trotting softly,  
with fair trappings.

The lawyers had no horses,  
For Simony and Civil Law  
And Simony and Civil swore  
And Provisors be appareld

angry men were they,  
must needs go a foot;  
summoners should be saddled,  
in palfrey wise.

“ Deans and subdeans,” quoth  
Civil,  
“ Archdeacons, officials,  
“ Saddle them with silver  
bribes  
“ Adultery, divorce,  
“ They shall carry the bishops  
“ Paulines people shall serve me  
“ Harness the Bishops officer,  
“ And buy us victuals  
“ And get from Liar a long cart  
“ Friars and beggars

“ come you together,  
and all you registrars,  
to make sins the lighter,  
and the dark ways of usury.  
to do their visitations,  
to complain in the courts,  
he shall draw us in a cart,  
from his fines for fornication;  
to carry all the lot of them,  
that are running on their feet.”

Thus Falsehood and Flattery  
And Meed in the midst of all  
I have no time to tell  
Of many manner of men  
Guile went ahead

fared forth together,  
and all the household after.  
the rag-tag that followed them,  
that live upon earth;  
and guided them all.

True-talk looked well at Guile  
But spurred his palfrey,  
And came to the kings Court,  
And Conscience told the king.

and said but little,  
and passed them all,  
and told it Conscience,

“ Now,” says the king, “ by  
Christ,  
“ Falsehood or Flattery

if I can catch  
or any of their fellows,

“ I would wreak vengeance  
 “ And hang them by the neck,  
 “ Never in this world shall man  
 “ But as the Law looketh on  
 men

“ Attach those traitors,”  
 “ Tether Falsehood fast  
 “ And roll off Guiles head,  
 “ And bring Meed before me

“ For Simony and Civil Law,  
 “ For fear the Church be  
 harmed  
 “ And if ye catch Liar  
 “ Till he be set in the pillory  
 “ Watch for them well,

Dread stood at the door  
 And went and bade Falsehood  
 flee  
 Falsehood for fear then  
 And Guile hurried aghast  
 But the merchants met him  
 And shut him in their shops  
 And dressed him as a 'prentice

Lightly Liar  
 Lurking in by-ways,  
 He was nowhere welcome  
 Hooted everywhere,

But the Pardoners had pity  
 They washed him and wiped  
 him,  
 And sent him out on Sundays  
 To give pardons by the pound

on wretches that do so,  
 and all that maintain them;  
 go bail for any one,  
 shall sentence fall on all.

he commands a constable,  
 in spite of all his gifts,  
 let him go no further,  
 in face of them all.

I send you to warn them  
 by them for ever.  
 let him not scape,  
 for all his prayers,  
 let none evade thee.”

and heard the kings judgment,  
 and all his fellows.  
 flew to the friars,  
 at thought of death,  
 and made him stay with them,  
 to show men their wares,  
 to serve the people.

leapt away thence,  
 lugged here and there,  
 for his many tales,  
 bad pack and go.

and pulled him in to them,  
 and wound him in a gown,  
 with bishops seals to churches,  
 to all people—for pence.

Then the doctors heard of this  
To come and stay with them,

and wrote Liar letters  
and study mens water.

Spicers spoke with him  
For he was learned in their  
craft  
Minstrels and messengers  
And maintained him half a  
year

to look at their ware,  
and knew many a gum.  
met Liar once,  
and eleven days.

But Friars with their fair  
speech  
And coped him like a Friar,  
Yet hath he leave to leap out  
And is welcome when he  
cometh

fetched him off thence,  
that none who came should  
know him,  
as often as he will,  
and oft with them dwelleth.

Simony and Civil Law  
And put them in the Popes  
hands  
But Conscience accused them;  
“ Sir King,” says he,  
“ Thy kingdom through their  
avarice  
“ And Holy Church be harmed

sent messages to Rome  
and appealed against the king,  
“ save clerks amend,  
will wholly change,  
for ever.”

All fled for fear  
None durst abide  
And truth to tell,  
And when she was attached

and flew to hiding places,  
save Meed the maid,  
she shook for fear,  
she wrung her hands and wept.



THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED  
BEFORE THE KING



# THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

Now is Meed the maid,  
None other with her,  
Then the king called a clerk,  
To take her and set her at ease.

by bedels and bailiffs,  
brought before the king.  
his name I know not,

“ I will assay her,  
“ What man upon earth  
“ And if she doth wisely  
“ I will forgive her this guilt,  
The clerk took Meed  
Mirth was made and minstrelsy  
They that dwell at Westminster

myself will question her,  
she loveth best,  
and followeth my will,  
so God help me.”  
and led her to the chamber;  
Meed to please withal;  
all honour her.

Joyfully, gently,  
Where this beauty dwelt;  
Gat leave of the clerk  
“ Mourn not, Meed,  
“ We will counsel the king,  
“ Thou shalt wed as thou wilt,  
“ For all that Conscience  
“ Might and mastery shall be  
thine  
“ With King, with Commons, and with Court.”  
Meed thanked them mildly  
A cup of gold,  
Or a ruby ring,  
The least man of her crew  
And with that they took their leave.

came the Justices  
they hurried to her bower,  
and offered her comfort:  
make thou no sorrow,  
we will shape thy path,  
and whom thou wilt,  
may plot or do.

and to do thine own pleasure  
and gave to each  
or a goblet of silver,  
or other rich gift;  
had a golden piece,

Then came the Clerks to comfort her;

“ Be blithe,

“ To work thy will

we be thy men,

while life endureth.”

And Meed sweetly

“ I will love you loyally,

“ And get livings for you,

“ And buy you benefices;

“ And your names be called  
aloud

“ If I love a clerk,

“ I am well known,

“ And cunning clerks that  
know me not

promised the same:

and make lords of you,

—while your silver lasteth—

ye shall be pluralists,

in the Bishops courts.

no ignorance shall stay him,  
he shall go forward,

shall couch behind.”

Then came a Confessor,

And whispered soft

“ Though gentle and simple

“ And Falsehood kept thee  
mistress

“ For a load of wheats price

“ And will be thy beadsman

“ Among clerks and knights

gowned like a Friar,

as though in shrift:

have lain by thy side,

this forty year,

I will assoil thee,

and will do thine errands

and Conscience defeat.”

Then Meed kneeled to the man

And shrove her of her sins,

Told him a tale

To be her beadsman

for all her evil deeds,

the shameless one;

and gave him a guinea,

and her go-between.

And he assoiled her

of her sins, and said:

“ We have a window a-making,

’twill cost us high,

“ Wilt thou glaze the gable,

Meed,

and grave thy name thereon?

to see heaven;

we will sing for thy soul,

as Sister of our Order.”

“ Sure shall thy soul be

“ At mass and at mattins

“ In thine honour solemnly

Lovely she laughed and said:

“ If that I wist  
 “ I would not make or mend  
 “ I will be your friend, Friar,  
 “ While ye show love to lords  
 “ And blame not those ladies  
 “ ’Tis but frailty of flesh  
 “ If one scape the slander,  
 “ ’Tis but one of the seven sins,  
 “ Be merciful, Friar,  
 “ And I will cover your kirk,  
 “ I will whiten and glaze  
 “ I will paint the picture  
 “ Every wight shall see and say:

there is no window nor altar  
 and write MEED thereon;  
 I will never fail you,  
 that follow lechery,  
 that love the same,  
 —from it we all come—  
 soon the harm is mended;  
 none sooner shriven.  
 to them that follow it,  
 and I will build your cloister,  
 your walls and your windows,  
 of her that paid for the making,  
 ‘ MEED—Sister of the Order.’ ”

*(The writer speaks to his generation)*

But God defend all good folk  
 Or to write in church windows  
 For with your name is painted  
 God knoweth your conscience  
 And what you spend and what  
 you hoard

Lords, leave such work  
 Or to call the priest to help you  
 Perchance here only is your  
 reward

*Let not thy left hand know . . .*

Thus, says the Gospel,

Give it so privily  
 In mens sight, or in your soul;  
 Who is courteous, who kind,

*(He turns to speak of corruption in small trade and of adulteration)*

Women that bake and brew,  
 They are the people  
 They harm the poor

such graving of your names,  
 your well-done deeds,  
 Pride and worldly pomp.  
 and your own heart,  
 and whose was the spent  
 money.

to write your names in windows,  
 when you give your charity,

and here your heaven.

should good men do their  
 alms,  
 that no pride be seen  
 God himself knoweth  
 who covetous, who free.

butchers and cooks,  
 that harm the poor,  
 who can but buy in penny-  
 worths,

And secretly and oft  
 They grow rich on their retail  
 They buy houses,  
 If they sold honestly  
 Nor buy their tenures.  
 Mayors and their officers  
 Between the king and commons  
 They should punish these

they poison them;  
 with what the poor should eat,  
 they become landlords,  
 they would not build so high,  
 the kings go-betweens  
 to keep the laws,  
 in pillories and stocks.

And the poor kneel and cry  
 Here on earth

to Christ to avenge them  
 or else in hell.

But Meed the maiden  
 To take a bribe  
 "Or take you presents,  
 "Silver cups and rings,  
 "For love of me  
 "And suffer them to sell  
**In whose hand wickednesses be; their right hand is ful-**  
**filled with gifts.**

besought the mayor  
 of all these hucksters:  
 (the coin avoiding),  
 and uphold their ways,  
 love them all,  
 somewhat against the law."

Solomon the sage  
 To amend mayors and them  
 He witnesseth what cometh  
**Fire shall destroy their tabernacles that gladly take gifts.**  
 "Fire shall fall and burn  
 "The houses and the homes  
 "Presents and yearly gifts,

he made a sermon,  
 that carry out the laws,  
 when men take Meed:  
 all to blue ashes  
 of them that ask for gifts,  
 because of their office."

*(The narrative proceeds)*  
 Then came the king from his  
 Council house  
 And sent for her to see him,  
 Courteously as became a king  
 Blamed her a little  
 And for wishing to be wedded  
 Till Truth had brought her  
 "Foolishly, woman,

and called for Meed,  
 I saw not who brought her.  
 the king blamed her,  
 for loving Guile,  
 without his will,  
 a token from himself.  
 hast thou often done;

"I have forgiven thee many  
 a time  
 "Thee and thine,  
 "But the longer I let thee go  
 "And never hast thou worse  
 done  
 "Hence to thy death-day  
 "God forbid that any more  
 "If thou shalt so do  
 "Or in a place far worse  
 "And hurt thee and harm thee  
 "Shall be ware by thy case  
 "I will teach thee to love truth

"I have a knight named Con-  
 science;  
 "If he will wed thee,  
 "Yea, my lord," saith she,  
 "If I be not at thy bidding,  
 Then was Conscience called  
 Before the king and his  
 council.  
 To wit the kings will

"Wilt thou wed this woman  
 "She is fain to be

"Christ forbid," quoth Conscience,  
 "Woe betide me,  
 "She is frail of her faith,  
 "She maketh men sin  
 "Trust in her treasure  
 "To wives and widows  
 "Your father she killed  
 "She poisoneth Popes

and granted thee my grace,  
 in hope thou shouldst amend,  
 the less truth is with thee,  
 than to take to thee Falsehood;  
 do so no more;  
 thou trouble Truth and me.  
 in Corfe Castle I shall shut  
 thee,  
 to live there as a nun,  
 that all wanton women  
 and shall ban thee and thine.  
 and take counsel of Reason.

he came from afar;  
 wilt thou have *him*?"

"God forbid it me  
 hang me at once."  
 to come and appear

Conscience kneeled low  
 and what he must do.

if I assent?  
 thy fellow and thy mate."

if such a wife I wed,  
 fickle in her speech,  
 many score times,  
 betrayeth many,  
 she teacheth wantonness,  
 through her false behests,  
 and harmeth the Church;

" Chattering in her tongue,  
 " As common as the pavement  
 " Monks and minstrels,  
 " Gentle and simple,  
 " Jurymen and summoners  
 " Sheriffs in shires  
 " She taketh mens life and  
     land,  
 " She payeth the gaolers gold  
 " And taketh true men by the  
     top  
 " For hatred she hangeth them  
 " For excommunication  
 " She giveth the bishops man  
     a cope  
 " When she will she is assoiled  
     of sin  
 " What the kings secret seal  
 " For she is in the Popes  
     secrets  
 " Simony and she  
  
 " She consecrateth bishops,  
 " She giveth parsons prebends,  
 " With their mistresses and  
     darlings  
 " To bring forth children  
 " Woe to the realm  
  
 " With her jewels, by Jesus,  
 " And fighteth against Law  
 " He may not get forth,  
 " She leadeth Law where she  
     pleaseth  
 " And maketh men through  
     love of her

lustful of her body,  
 to every man that walketh,  
 lepers in hedges,  
 are her lovers when they will;  
 are the men that praise her,  
 were lost if MEED were gone;  
  
 setteth laws prisoners free,  
 to let the false go far and wide,  
  
 and bindeth and hangeth them,  
 who never did her harm.  
 she careth not a rush,  
  
 and his clerk a coat,  
  
 and in one month can do  
 can do in three,  
  
 —foreign priests know it—  
 seal the Popes letters.  
  
 ignorant though they be,  
 she abetteth priests  
  
 all their life long,  
 against the Church law.  
 when MEED is well with the  
     king.  
  
 she shameth your justices,  
 and stoppeth Faith at the gate,  
 her florins fly so thickly;  
  
 and holdeth her courts  
 lose what justice oweth.

“ To the poor the courts are a  
    maze

“ Law is so lordly

“ Without money paid in  
    presents

“ Barons and burgesses

“ And all that are care-worn

“ Clergy and avarice

“ This is that ladys life,

“ And all that uphold her,

“ Poor men have no chance

“ No, though they be in pain,

Then Meed wept

To give her grace to speak;

“ Excuse thee if thou canst,

“ For Conscience accuseth thee

“ Nay, my lord,” quoth she,

“ When ye wot truly

“ Wherever great mischief is

“ And Conscience knoweth

“ Nor to deprave him,

“ Well knowest thou, false one,

“ Thou hast hung on my side

“ Hast had thy grip on my  
    gold

“ It maketh me wonder

“ I can crown thee with gifts,

“ Foully thou defamest me

“ I never killed no king,

“ Not for me was the king hurt

if he plead there all his life,  
and loth to end his case;

Law listeneth to few.

she bringeth to sorrow,  
and would live in truth.

she coupleth together;  
God give her sorrow,  
mischance betide them,  
to plead their cause,  
so strong is MEED.”

and prayed the king  
and the king granted it:  
I can say but that,  
and would exile thee for ever.”

“ believe him not a whit,  
with whom the wrong lieth.

there MEED can help,  
I came not to chide  
with a proud heart.  
unless thou wilt lie,  
ten times and more

to give it where pleased thee,  
why thou art wroth with me.  
help thee more than thou  
knowest;

here before the king.  
no, nor counselled it,  
that time in Normandy;

“ Thou, Conscience, shamedst  
him,  
“ Thou thoughtest winter  
“ Thou fearedst death  
“ Hurredst to England

“ Thou, robber pitiless,  
“ Poor mens money hadst thou

“ I stayed there with my lord  
“ I made his men merry  
“ I patted their backs,  
“ I made them hop for hope  
“ Had I been marshal of hismen,  
“ I durst have wagered my life,  
“ He should have had France  
“ And been king of that nation  
“ The least bairn of his blood

“ Then Conscience like a coward  
“ To leave his lordship  
“ The richest realm

“ It becometh a king  
“ To give MEED to men  
“ To aliens, to all men,  
“ MEED maketh him loved,  
“ Emperors, earls,  
“ By MEED get yeomen  
“ The Pope and his prelates  
“ Give MEED to men  
“ Servants for their service  
“ Beggars for their prayers  
“ Minstrels for their mirth  
“ The king MEEDETH his men  
“ Men that teach children  
“ Priests that preach

creptest into tents for cold,  
never would cease,  
for the dim cloud,  
for thy hungry belly.

robbest the poor;  
Calais to sell.

his life to save,  
and stopped all mourning,  
I boldened their hearts,  
to get MEED when they would;  
by Mary of Heaven,  
no less wager,  
in length and in breadth,  
his own kin to help;  
a barons peer had been.

counselled him thence,  
for a little silver,  
the clouds hang over.

who keepeth his realm  
who humbly serve him,  
to honour them with gifts,  
MEED maketh him a man;  
all manner of lords,  
to run and ride;  
take gifts and MEED,  
to uphold their laws;  
take MEED of their masters;  
get MEED that they pray for;  
ask men for MEED;  
to keep peace in his land;  
crave of them MEED;  
and teach the people

“ Ask MEED and mass-pence  
 “ Men of all crafts  
 “ Merchants and MEED  
 “ No wight I ween

and their food also;  
 crave MEED for their' prentices;  
 go the road together,  
 without MEED can live.”

Saith the king to Conscience,  
 “ Meed is right worthy

“ By Christ, methinketh,  
 to have the mastery.”

“ Nay,” quoth Conscience,  
 “ That Meed is evermore  
 “ There are two manner of MEEDS,  
 “ One is given by Gods grace  
 “ To them that well work  
 “ The prophet preached of it  
**Lord, wbo shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?**  
 “ Take no Meed, my lord,  
 “ Love them, believe them,  
 “ Gods Meed and Gods mercy

“ clerks know the truth,  
 maintainer of Guile;  
 MEEDS, my lord;  
 in the bliss of heaven  
 while they be here,  
 and in the Psalter put it;  
 of men that be true,  
 for our Lords love in heaven,  
 therewith shalt thou win.

“ But there is Meed and Wage  
 “ Desert for a deed,  
 “ Meed many a time  
 “ And that is neither right nor  
 reason  
 “ For man to take wage  
 “ The man is overbold  
 “ That before work is done  
 “ Harlots and whores,  
 “ They ask their hire-money  
 “ The guileful give before  
 “ When the deed is done  
 “ That is no Meed but wage  
 “ And if it be not paid  
 “ As in the Book that bids  
 “ The hirelings hire  
**The work of thine hired man shall not dwell with thee till  
 the morrow=tide.**

and both men think  
 open or secretly,  
 is given before the deed,

and no nations law  
 save he deserves it.  
 or else he is not true,  
 is paid or pay asketh.  
 and false physicians,  
 ere they have deserved it.  
 and good men after,  
 and the day ended.  
 a due debt for the doing,  
 the payer is to blame  
 none should withhold  
 until the morning:

“ Priests and parsons that would please men  
 “ That take Meed and money for masses that they sing:  
**Here they have their reward.**

“ What labourers and low men take from their masters  
 “ Is no manner of Meed, it is measurable hire.

“ In merchandise is no Meed, I well avow it,  
 “ It is an open change, one pennyworth for another,  
 “ And though the king of his courtesy, or Kaiser or Pope.  
 “ Give men land or lordship, or other large gifts,  
 “ To their leal liege subjects; love is the reason,  
 “ And if the leal liege men be unloyal after,  
 “ Then may King and Kaiser and the crownèd Pope  
 “ Disavow that they did and others endow with it,  
 “ And take it away anon; never more after  
 “ May the men nor their heirs be bold to claim  
 “ What King or Kaiser gave them in property or rent.

“ God gave Solomon grace upon earth,  
 “ Riches and reason, while he lived rightly,  
 “ And as soon as God saw he wrought not His will,  
 “ He robbed him of his riches and of his right mind,  
 “ And let him live in unbelief. I think he be in hell.

“ So God giveth nothing but with, *If thou dost well*,  
 “ And King and Pope may give and grant  
 “ And take it again from them that do ill,  
 “ Whoso readeth Kings may read of MEED.  
 “ She brought Absalom to hang on the tree,  
 “ And since King Saul saved a king for MEED  
 “ Against Gods orders; God took such vengeance  
 “ That Saul for that sin and his sons died.  
 “ God sent to Saul by Samuel the prophet  
 “ That Agag of Amalek and all his liege people  
 “ Should die for a deed their fathers had done:

“ ‘Therefore,’ said Samuel,  
 “ ‘Be obedient and ready  
 “ ‘Wend with thy host  
 “ ‘Children and churls,  
 “ ‘Look thou kill the king,  
 “ ‘For millions of money;  
 “ ‘Children and cattle

“ And for he killed not  
 “ Coveted fair cattle,  
 “ God sent to say  
 “ And all his seed for that  
 sin  
 “ Such mischief MEED  
 “ God hated him ever

“ The end of this story  
 “ For fear I offend  
 “ For so goes the world  
 “ If a man tell them truths

“ Right as Agag had  
 “ Samuel shall slay him,  
 “ David be diademed  
 “ And one Christian king  
 “ MEED shall no more  
 “ But Love and Lowliness

“ And he that trespasseth  
 “ Loyalty shall teach him law

“ And no sergeant wear silk  
 “ Nor fur on his cloak  
 “ MEED paid by misdoers  
 “ That Law is waxed a proud  
 lord  
 “ Unkindness is in power,

‘ God himself biddeth thee  
 his bidding to do,  
 women to kill,  
 chop them to death;  
 covet not his goods,  
 murder them each,  
 burn all to ashes.’

as God himself bad  
 and killed not his beasts,  
 that Saul should die

shamefully end.  
 brought on the king,  
 and his heirs after him.

I care not to show;  
 no end will I make;  
 with them that have power  
 he the sooner is blamed.

it shall happen to—some;  
 Saul shall be blamed,  
 and defy them all,  
 shall keep us his people,  
 be master on earth,  
 and Loyalty together.

against the Truth,  
 or lose his life.

for service that he doth,  
 for pleading at the Bar.  
 so rich men maketh

and Loyalty is poor;  
 Kindness is banished,

“ But human love shall yet come,  
“ And make lawyers labourers;

“ And such peace among the people  
“ That Jews shall wax glad  
“ Their King be come from Heaven,  
“ Moses or the Messiah,  
“ And all that wear daggers,  
“ Axes and hatchets,  
“ Shall be doomed to the death  
“ To scythe or sickle,  
**And they shall beat together  
their spears into scythes.**

“ Each man shall play with a plough,  
“ Shall spin or spread dung,  
“ Priests and parsons  
“ Their psalters and their Seven Psalms,  
“ If any of them use  
“ He shall lose his livelihood,  
“ Neither king nor constable,  
“ Shall trouble the people,  
“ Nor put them on a jury-list  
“ But as a deed is done  
“ Mercy or no mercy.

“ Kings court, commons courts,  
“ All shall be one court,  
“ His name is tidy True-tongue,  
“ Battles shall be none,  
“ And if a smith smithy one  
**Then shall not rear folk against folk a sword.**

and Conscience with him,  
such love shall arise;

and such perfect truth  
and ween indeed  
(men be so true)  
or bright swords or lances,  
and any other weapon,  
unless he do smithy it  
share or coulter:  
**their swords into shares and**

pickaxe or spade,  
or spoil his life with sloth;  
shall hunt—their masses,  
and pray for sinful men.  
hawking or hunting,  
perchance his life;  
knight nor mayor,  
nor summon them to court,  
to make them take an oath,  
it shall be judged,

consistory and chapter,  
and one judge—Justice;  
he never harmed me yet;  
nor none wear an edge-tool,  
it shall smite him to death.

*And see this good fortune fall  
 Six suns and a ship be seen,  
 And mid-moon shall make  
 And Saracens shall see and sing  
 And on Mahomet and Meed*

*men shall find worse fortune,  
 and half a sheaf of arrows,  
 Jews to be converted,  
 Glory to God in the highest,  
 mishap shall come.*

**Better is a good name than many riches.**

*As wroth as the wind*

*was Meed at that,*

*“ See what Solomon saith,*

*in the Book of Wisdom,*

*“ They that give gifts*

*win the victory,*

*“ And have much honour withal.”*

*“ I believe thee, lady,*

*thy text is true,*

*“ Thou art like the lady*

*that a verse read*

*“ Try all things*

*—that pleased her heart,—*

*“ The leaf ended at those words,*

*and turned the leaf over,*

*“ Had she looked on the left*

*Hold fast to that which is true,*

*“ She would have found:*

*shall find a text of woe,*

*“ So he that readeth Wisdom*

*to them that take this MEED.*

*“ A full sad text*

*to turn your leaf for you,*

*“ There was no cunning clerk*

*the victory*

*“ He that giveth gifts winneth the victory*

*And bath much honour withal, but he taketh away the soul*

*of him that receiveth them.*

*“ Worship he winneth*

*who will give MEED,*

*“ But the soul that taketh the*

*gift*

*by that gift is bound.”*



THE VISION OF REASON  
CONSCIENCE AND THE KING



## THE VISION OF REASON

“CEASE,” quoth the king,  
“Ye shall be friends  
“Kiss her, Conscience,

“Nay, by Christ,” says he,  
“Save Reason bid me

“Then,” quoth the king,  
“And fetch me Reason  
“And he shall rule my realm  
“Of thee, Conscience,  
“How thou leadest my people,

“I am glad of that covenant,”  
And rode forth to Reason

“I am ready,” says Reason,  
And called Cato his man,  
And *Tommy True-Tongue-*  
*Nor-merry-lies-*  
“Set my saddle  
“Fasten it well  
“And hang the heavy bridle on  
“He will wince and kick

Then Conscience on his way  
And Reason with him  
“What a Queen Meed is,

One Waryn Wisdom  
Followed them fast,

“I suffer it no longer,  
and serve me both of you;  
I bid thee kiss her.”

“congee me for ever,  
I would rather die.”

“haste thee and ride,  
and bid him come  
and take account of thee,  
so Christ help me,  
learned and lowly.”

said Conscience, “ifaith,”  
and rounded in his ear.

“Rest thou a while,”  
courteous of speech,  
*Tell-me-no-Tales-*  
*I-never-loved-them.*  
on *Suffer-till-I-see-my-time*,  
with *Wise-word* girths  
to hold his head low,  
ere he comes to the Court.”

set forth to ride,  
whispering together,  
among rich and poor.”

and his mate Wily-man  
which had to do

With Exchequer, chancery,  
And rode fast, that Reason  
And save them, for silver,

and discharges of debts;  
should counsel them well  
from shame and from harm.

“Here come they,” quoth  
Conscience,

“slaves of covetise,  
and reck not of either

“Ride on, Sir Reason,  
“Where wrath is and wrang-  
ling,

there will they bide,  
their hearts are not.

“Where love is and loyalty,

Sorrow and cursedness is in the ways of them.

“They give of their goods, not a goose wing,  
The dread of God is not before their eyes.

“They would do more  
“Or a dozen capons,  
“Than for love of our Lord  
“Let them ride on, Reason,  
“I, Conscience, know them  
not,

for a dozen chickens,  
or a seam of oats,  
or all his dear Saints;  
—rich folks—by themselves,  
nay, nor doth Christ.”

On rode Reason  
Conscience guiding,

by the strait high gate,  
till they came to the king.

Courteously the king met him  
Between himself and the Prince

and set him on a bench  
and talked long together.

Then came Peace to Parlia-  
ment

and put forth a bill:  
against my will,  
Reginalds love,  
—when he met her late;  
his fellows fetch,  
fight nor chide;  
brought him home never,

“Wrong has taken my wife  
“He has ravished Rose,  
“And Margarets maidenhead  
“My geese and pigs  
“I dare not for dread of him  
“Borrowed my horse of me,

" And never a farthing,  
 " To S. Giles fair  
 " He watcheth me well  
 " Which way I go  
 " He maintaineth his men  
 " He forestalleth my goods  
 " He breaketh up my barn  
     door  
 " And giveth me a *tally*  
 " Me and mine he threateneth,  
 " Nor am I strong enough

*The king knew he said truth,  
 Wrong was a wicked wretch*

Then was Wrong afeard,  
 Offered him pence:  
 " I would not reck if Peace  
 Then Wisdom and Waryn  
 " He that worketh by lust  
 " I say it of thee  
 " If Meed will not help thee  
 " Thy life and thy land  
 Then vowed Wrong  
 To make peace with his pence,

*Wisdom and Wit then  
 And took Meed with them*

Peace put his head forth,  
 " Guiltless, God wot,  
 " Conscience knoweth it  
  
 But Wisdom and Wit  
 To win the king with bribes.

*The king swore, by Christ,  
 Wrong for his evil deeds*

for all I cared plead;  
 I dare not take money,  
 when I take silver with me,  
 to rifle and rob me;  
 to murder my labourers,  
 and fighteth when I sell;  
  
 and carrieth off my wheat,  
 for ten quarters of oats,  
 lieth with my maid,  
 even to look on him."

*Conscience told him,  
 and wrought much sorrow.*

begged Wisdom make his peace,  
 " Had I the kings love  
 railed for ever."  
 warned Wrong wisely,  
 oft maketh wrath.  
 thou shalt it well find  
 thy harm is sure,  
 lie in her grace."  
 to Wisdom full eagerly  
 and paid " handy dandy."

*went together,  
 mercy to win.*

his scalp all bloody;  
 gat I this scathe,  
 and the true commons."

*went their ways*

and by his crown,  
 should suffer woe,

Commanded the constable  
"Let him not see his feet

to cast him in irons;  
for this seven year."

“ God wot,” saith Wisdom,  
“ If he will make amends  
“ And he shall give sureties  
“ Amend what is mis-done

" this is not the best way,  
let him have bail,  
and buy him his remedy,  
and evermore be better."

Wit agreed:  
"Than for ill to be beaten,

"Better is a remedy  
and remedy no better."

Then Meed bethought her  
Proffered Peace a present  
" Take this, man, from me,  
" And I will wager Wrong

and begged for him mercy,  
all of pure gold:  
to heal thy hurt,  
shall do so no more.”

Then Peace pitifully  
To have mercy on the man

prayed to the king  
that had so often wronged  
him:

“ He hath paid me well,  
“ So that the king assent,  
“ Meed hath made amends.

and—I forgive him,  
I can no more say,  
I ask no more.”

“ Nay,” quoth the king,  
“ Wrong goeth not so away,  
“ If he slip lightly off  
“ And be the bolder  
“ If Reason hath not pity  
“ As long as he liveth,

“ Christ help me,  
I will learn more of this;  
then will he laugh at me,  
to beat my servants;  
he shall stay in my stocks  
till lowliness be bail.”

Some men counselled Reason:  
"Advise the king,  
"To let Meed go bail for Wro-

"Have thou pity,  
advise Conscience,  
"

"Counsel me no pity," says Reason,  
"Till lords and ladies love

love the truth.

"Till they hate the loose word to hear it or speak it,  
 "Till the harlots kirtle be hidden away,  
 "Till children be cherished with the stroke of the rod,  
 "Till holiness of the wicked be taken at its worth,  
 "Till the clergy be covetous to clothe the poor,  
 "Till the rambling monks be kept to their cloister,  
 "Till preachers preaching be proved by their lives,  
 "Till the kings Council be the profit of the people,  
 "Till bishops horses be sold for houses,  
 "Their hawks and their hounds to help Gods poor,  
 "Till men go on pilgrimage to where the sick lie,  
 "In prisons and in humble cots; save where I send them,  
 "And if men go a pilgirming, let them stay there for ever.  
 "Till Rome-runners carry no silver over sea,  
 "Graven or ungraven, for the robber Pope of France,  
 "On forfeiture of it if it be found at Dover,  
 "(Saving it be merchant, or messenger with letters,  
 "Or appointed priests returning to the Pope.)  
 "By the rood of Christ no pity will I have  
 "While Meed is mistress in this Council hall;  
 "If I were crownèd king to keep a realm  
 "Never should Wrong go unpunished,  
 "Nor get my mercy by bribes, God save my soul,  
 "No, not unless penitence went with the fine.  
 "The man EVIL shall ever meet the man PUNISHMENT,  
 "The man GOOD shall ever meet REWARD.  
 "If thou, king, wilt do this, I wager my hands  
 "Lawyers shall turn labourers, and lead the dung a-field,  
 "And Love shall be the leader in thy land."

I saw Meed in the Council hall wink at the lawyers,  
 And they laughed and went and many left Reason.

All the righteous knew  
And Kind-Wit and Conscience  
And rich and poor loved him.

that Reason spoke truth,  
courteously thanked him,

“ We see well,” they said,  
“ Meekness is master of Meed at the last.”

Love made light of Meed,  
And they cried to Conscience  
“ If a man take Meed to wife  
“ Cut off my nose

Loyalty made lighter,  
—the king might well hear it—  
for her wealth and her goods  
if he be not cuckolded.”

Meed mourned then  
For the commons called her

and her countenance was  
sad,  
“ quaint, common whore.”

A juror and a summoner  
And a sheriffs clerk  
“ Full oft have I  
“ And yet you never gave me

followed her fast,  
cursed before the company:  
helped you at the Bar,  
the worth of a rush.”

Neither Wisdom  
Could frame a word  
They stared and studied

nor Witty his mate  
to withsay Reason;  
and stood like cows.

The king agreed, by Christ,  
And rehearsed all that Reason  
“ But, by my head, 'tis hard  
“ All my liege people

to Reasons cunning,  
had rightfully shown:  
to bring things to this,  
to lead to honesty.”

“ By him that stretched  
“ If I rule not thy realm thus  
“ If so be obedience  
“ And bring all men to bow  
    to me  
“ Without fines, without  
    murders,

on the Rood,” quoth Reason,  
rend out my ribs;  
is at one with me,  
amending the kingdom,  
without bitter wounds.”

“ I would it were well,”

“ Therefore, Reason, indeed

“ But be my chief chancellor

“ And Conscience Justice

“ I assent if thou, king,

“ *Hear the other side.*

“ No sufferance of wrong

“ Nor shall there be stay of proceedings.

“ Then I wager my life

“ To pay thy wages

“ More than all thy merchants,

“ Or Lombards of Italy,

quoth the king, “ the world  
over;

thou shalt not ride hence,  
in Exchequer and in Parlia-  
ment,

in all my courts.”

wilt hear causes too.

Among aldermen and com-  
moners

shall seal your secret letters,

that Love will lend thee silver  
and help to win thee gold  
or thy mitred bishops,  
that live by Jews usury.”

The king commanded Conscience to congee his officers

And take those whom Reason

loved,

and with that I woke.



# THE WRITERS LIFE



## THE WRITERS LIFE

THUS I woke, God wot,  
Kit my wife and I,  
And among the London lollers  
And among the hermits  
For I made verses on them

where I dwelt in Cornhill.  
dressed like a loller,  
little was I set by,  
(trust me for that),  
as my wit taught me.

Once when I had my health,  
And my limbs to labour with,  
And nothing in life to do,  
In health of body and mind,  
I came on Conscience,  
He met and questioned me,  
And Reason reproved me.

in hot harvest time,  
and loved good fare,  
but drink and sleep,  
  
and Reason met me,  
and my memory roamed back,

“ Canst thou serve as a priest  
“ Make a haycock in the field  
“ Canst mow or stock  
“ Canst reap or guide the  
    reapers?  
“ Canst blow the horn,  
“ Lie out o’ nights,

or sing in church?  
or pitch the hay?  
or bind the sheaves?  
  
Canst rise early?  
and keep the kine together,  
and save my corn from thieves?

“ Make shoes or clothes,  
“ Trim hedge, use harrow,  
“ Or do any other work  
“ To win some living

or herd the sheep?  
or drive the swine and geese,  
that the people need  
for them that be bedridden? ”

“ Nay,” said I, “ God help me,  
“ I am too weak to work  
“ I am too long, believe me,  
“ Or to last for any time

with sickle or with scythe.  
to stoop low down,  
as a true working man.”

“ Then hast thou lands to  
live by  
“ That findeth thee thy food?  
“ Thou art a spender and canst  
spend;  
“ Or thou beggest thy living  
“ Thou art a Friday-beggar,  
  
“ A lollers life is thine,  
“ Righteousness rewardeth men  
**Thou shalt yield to each man**  
“ Thou art maybe broken  
“ Maimed maybe through  
mishap,

“ When I was young,” quoth I,  
“ My father and my friends  
“ Till I knew throughly  
“ What is best for the body,  
“ Yet never did I find  
“ A life that pleased me  
“ If I must live by labour  
“ I must needs labour  
**Each man in what calling be is called there dwell be.**

“ I live *in* London  
“ The tools I labour with,  
“ Are the Lords Prayer, my  
Primer,  
“ And sometimes my Psalter  
“ I sing masses for the souls  
“ And they that find me food  
“ Man or woman, once a month,  
“ No bag have I nor bottle,

“ Moreover, my lord Reason,  
“ Constrain no cleric

or rich lineage  
An idle man thou seemest;  
  
thou art a spill-time,  
at mens buttery hatches;  
a feast-day beggar in the  
churches;  
little to be praised.  
as they deserve.  
**after his works.**  
in body or limb,  
  
therefore art thou excused? ”

“ many a year ago,  
set me to school  
what Holy Scripture said,  
what is safest for the soul.  
since my friends died  
save in these long clothes,  
and earn my living  
at the work I learned.

and I live *on* London,  
to get my living by,  
  
my Dirges and my Vespers,  
and the Seven Psalms;  
of those that give me help,  
welcome me when I come,  
into their houses;  
only my belly.

men should, methinks,  
to do common work,

“ The tonsured clerk, a man of understanding,  
 “ Should neither sweat nor toil, nor swear at inquests,  
 “ Nor fight in the van of battle, nor hurt his foe.

**Render not evil for evil.**

“ They be the heirs of heaven, all that are ordained,  
 “ And in choir and church Christ's own ministers.

**The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.**

“ Clerks it becometh for to serve Christ,  
 “ And for folk unordained to cart and work,

“ And no clerk should be tonsured

save he be the son  
 and of wedded folk;  
 and beggars children,  
*these* are to serve lords,  
 as their station asketh.

“ Of frankleyns and free men

are made into bishops,  
 are made archdeacons,

“ Bondmen and bastards

are knights for silvers sake,

“ *These* are the sons of labour,

and have mortgaged their rents  
 have ridden against our foes  
 and honour the king,  
 that should support the poor

“ To serve God and the good

and paid the fees for it,  
 refuse poor gentle blood,  
 to keep the Sanctuary;  
 have long to us been strangers,  
 or they be somehow changed.

“ But since bondmens sons

“ And bastard bairns

“ And soap-makers and their sons

“ And lords sons be their labourers

“ And to support this realm

“ To comfort the Commons

“ And monks and nuns

“ Have made their own kin knights

“ Popes and patrons

“ And take the sons of Mammon

“ Holiness of life and Love

“ And will be till these things wear out,

“ Therefore, rebuke me not,

“ For in my conscience I know

“ Prayers of a perfect man

“ These be the dearest work

Reason, I pray thee,  
 what Christ would have me do.  
 and his discreet penance,  
 that our Lord loveth.”

Quoth Conscience, " By Christ,  
 " But to beg your life in cities  
 " Save you be in obedience I see not where this tendeth,  
 is not the perfect life,  
 to Prior or to Minster."

" That's truth," said I,  
 " That I have lost my time,  
 " And yet I hope that even  
     as one  
 " And always lost and lost  
 " To buy him such a bargain  
 " And all his loss is at the last  
 " Such a winning is his,  
**The kingdom of heaven is like treasure . . . etcetera,**  
**A woman who found a piece of silver . . . etcetera,**  
 " Even so hope I to have  
 " A gobbet of His grace;  
 " That shall turn to profit

" I counsel thee," quoth  
 Reason,  
 " The life that is commendable  
 " *Aye, and continue in it,*"

So to the kirk I went  
 Before the Cross 'upon my  
     knees  
 Sighing for my sins,  
 Weeping and wailing

" I do acknowledge it,  
 mis-spent my time,  
 who oft hath bought and sold  
 and at the last hath happened  
 that he is better for ever  
 only as a leaf,  
 under Gods grace,  
**etcetera,**  
 of Him that is Almighty  
 and then begin a time  
 all the days of my life."

" hurry to begin  
 and dear to the soul;"  
 quoth Conscience.

to honour my Lord;  
 I knocked my breast,  
 saying my prayer,  
 till again I was asleep.

# THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

PREACHED TO THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK, AND OF THE  
SHRIVING OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS



## THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

THE king and his knights  
To hear the days mattins  
Then I waked from my slumber  
That I had not slept sounder  
But ere I fared a furlong  
I could go no foot further  
And sat me softly down,  
Babbled my prayers,

to the kirk went,  
and the mass after.  
and woe it was to me  
and seen the more,  
faintness took me;  
for want of sleep,  
and said my creed,  
they brought me sleep.

Then I saw much more  
I saw the FIELD FULL OF FOLK.  
Reason arrayed himself  
And held a cross before the  
king

than I have told before,  
and preached to all the king-  
dom,  
and thus began:

He prayed the people  
He proved these Pestilences  
The South-West hurricane  
Was openly for pride,  
Pear trees, plum trees,  
An example, ye men,  
Beeches and broad oaks  
Their roots up-turned  
That deadly sin at Doomsday

have pity on themselves.  
were for pure sin.  
on Saturday even,  
for nothing else,  
puffed to earth,  
ye should live better lives.  
blown to the ground,  
in token of dread,  
shall ruin us all.

He bade wasters go work  
And with some kind of craft

at what they best knew,  
earn what they wasted now.

He prayed Parnel the gay  
And keep it in her coffer

put by her broidered robe,  
to serve her at her need.

Tom Stowe he told  
And bring home Felice to take two sticks,  
from the scolding-stool.

Watt he warned his wife was in the wrong,  
Her bonnet cost a half-mark. his hood a groat.

Batt he bad go and cut a bough or two,  
And beat Betty with it if she would not work.

Merchants he charged to chasten their children  
And let no money pamper them while they be young,  
And not to cocker them for any plague that comes.

“ My sire told me and my dame  
“ That the dearer the child is the more he must learn  
“ Solomon that wrote Wisdom said the same:  
**Qui parcit virgae odit filium.**  
“ The English of this Latin is, if any one would know it,  
“ Spare the switch, spill the son.”

And then he prayed prelates: “ What ye preach, do,  
“ Live as ye teach us, we shall trust you the better.”

Then he bade Religion keep to her Rule,  
“ Lest the king and the take your wealth  
commons  
“ And be stewards in your till ye be better governed.”

“ Gregory that great clerk wrote the Rule down—  
“ As fishes in drought die for water,  
“ Even so Religion, rotteth and starveth  
“ When out of cloister it coveteth to dwell:  
“ For if there be heaven on or ease to any soul,  
earth, “ It is in the cloister or the school.  
“ To the cloister man cometh not to chide nor fight,

" All is book and obedience, reading and learning;  
 " In the school the clerk is  
     scorned  
 " Great love and liking there;  
     if he will not learn;  
     each loveth other.

" But now is Religion a rider,  
 " A leader at the love-day,  
 " Pricking on a palfrey  
 " A heap of hounds at his back  
 " And if his servant kneel not  
 " He loureth on him asking  
 " Badly have lords done  
 " Away to the Orders  
 " Money rains upon their altars.  
 " There where such parsons be  
 " They have no pity on the  
     poor;  
 " Ye hold you as lords;  
 " But there shall come a king  
 " And beat you as the Bible  
     saith  
 " He shall mend you monks  
 " And put you to your penance  
 " And barons and their sons  
 These in chariots and these  
     and fell down.  
 " Friars in their begging  
 " To Constantines coffers  
 " That Gregorys godchildren  
 " For the Abbot of Abingdon  
 " Shall be knocked on their  
     crowns  
 " But ere that king come,  
 " The church and the clergy  
     Then he counselled the king  
     " Where treason is not  
     a roamer through the streets,  
     a buyer of the land,  
     from manor to manor,  
     as tho he were a lord,  
     when he brings his cup,  
     who taught him courtesy.  
     to give their heirs lands  
     that have no pity;  
     living at ease  
     that is their 'charity.'  
     your lands are too broad,  
     and he shall shrive you all  
     for breaking of your Rule.  
     you canons and you nuns,  
     and make you walk in old paths  
     shall blame and reprove you.  
     in horses . . . they be bound  
     shall find the key  
     in which is the money  
     wickedly wasted.  
     and his niece the abbess  
     and the wound shall be mortal.  
     so chronicles tell me,  
     shall be clothed new."

the commons to love  
     they are thy treasure,"

“ And treacle in thy need.  
 “ Rich and commons should  
     agree  
 “ Let no manner of counsel  
 “ But in sense and good will  
 “ In heaven on high  
 “ Till liar Lucifer  
 “ Worthier and wittier

“ Hold ye then in unity  
 “ Is cause of all that cumbers

Then he prayed the pope  
 And grant no grace  
 Among all kings  
 “ And all confessors  
 “ Give Peace as your penance  
 “ For all manner deeds

“ And ye that seek S. James,  
 “ Seek ye Saint Truth,  
 Who with the Father and the Son . . .  
 “ Fair befall them  
 So ended Reason.

in all kind of truth.  
 nor covetise part you,  
 guard ye your trust.  
 was such a holy commonweal  
 believed himself  
 than his Master was.

and he who would teach you  
     other  
 and confounds a realm.”

have pity on the church,  
 till good love comes  
 over their Christian peoples;  
 that shrieve any king  
 and perpetual pardon  
 and for each to love others.

and saints of Rome,  
 for he shall save you all,  
 that follow my sermon,”

(*Here begin the Repentance and Shriving of the Seven Deadly Sins*)

Then ran Repentance  
 And made me, William, weep.

and repeated Reasons words

(PRIDE OF WOMAN)

Parnel proud-hearted  
 Long she lay ere she looked  
 Promised to Him  
 She would unsew her shift  
 To tame her flesh

lay flat upon the earth,  
 “ O God, have mercy.”  
 that made us all  
 and set a hair shirt there,  
 so fierce to sin:

“Pride shall not draw me,  
“I will let me be slandered,  
“Now I will meek me,  
“All this till now

I will hold me low,  
that did I never;  
mercy beseeching;  
have I hated in my heart.”

“Repent thee,” quoth Repentance,  
“Shrive thee and sharply

“as Reason hath taught thee,  
and shake off thy pride.”

(PRIDE OF MAN)

“I, Pride, patiently,  
“First to father and mother  
“Unabashed to offend  
“Inobedient to the Church  
“I judged her for her vices;  
“With word and wit  
  
“Scorning them and others  
“That simple folk should  
    think me  
“Proud of my apparel;  
“Other than I was  
“Willing men to think me,  
“Rich and eloquent,  
“A boaster, a braggart, I,  
“Vaunting my vainglory  
“Singular, alone,  
“Some time in one faith,  
“Wishing men should think  
“*My* craft the cleverest,  
“*My* strength the stiffest,  
“*My* love the sweetest,  
“Proud of my fair features,

ask for penance,  
was I inobedient,  
God and the good,  
and to them that serve her,  
I urged on others,  
the churchmens evil works to  
    show,  
when I saw my time

witty and wise.  
appearing among men  
in mind or in wealth;  
for the goods I had,  
righteous in my life;  
full of bold oaths,  
in face of all reproof;  
for none was like to me;  
some time in another,  
*my* work was the best,  
*my* riding the strongest,  
*my* face the handsomest,  
*my* crimes the boldest,  
proud of my shrill song.

“What I gave for Gods love  
“For them to think me holy,

I told my gossips all about it  
holy and free of alms;

"None so bold a beggar  
 "A teller of tales  
 "Things that none had thought  
     on  
 "Them that sat beside me  
 "Lo, if ye believe me not  
 "Ask him, ask her,  
 "What I suffered, what I saw,  
 "What I once could do,  
 "I would men knew it all  
 "To be praised among the people."  
**If I pleased men I could not be Christs servant,  
 No man can serve two masters.**  
 "Now God of his goodness  
 Quoth Repentance.

to ask what I craved;  
 in inns and at street corners;  
 I swore I saw them done;  
 I took to witness:  
 or if ye ween I lie  
 for they can tell you all.'  
 what I had, what I knew,  
 what kin I came of,  
 if it but helped my pride  
 give thee grace to amend,"  
 on Lechers have mercy."

## (LECHERY)

Then said Lechery, "Alas,  
 "Lady, to thy dear Son,  
 "To have pity on me lustful  
 "I will drink with the duck  
 "I am guilty in spirit,  
 "In words, in dress,  
 "Every maid I met  
 "Some would I kiss and handle  
 "On fast days, on Fridays,  
 "In Lent and out of Lent,  
 "Such work with me and them  
 "Merry tales we had  
 "Clever songs we made;  
 "To win with guile  
 "Some I won by sorcery,  
 "I took the loveliest  
 "When I was old and hoar  
 "Then would I laugh at lecherous tales.  
 "Now, Lord, of thy grace,

O our Lady,  
 pray for me now;  
 of his pure mercy and grace;  
 and dine but once on Saturday.  
 I am guilty in body,  
 in watching for eyes.  
 I made her a sin-sign,  
 till our lust was one;  
 on feast-day vigils,  
 all times were one to me;  
 was never out of season.  
 of lust and paramours,  
 we sent out bawds,  
 women to my will.  
 some I won by strength;  
 and never loved them after.  
 and had lost my nature  
 on Lechers have mercy."

## (ENVY)

Envy with heavy heart

“ My fault,” says he,

His clothes were of cursing

He was pale as a stone;

And like a leek that had lain

So looked he with long cheeks

His body was all swollen with

wrath;

And went wringing his fists;

With word or deed

Every word he threw

Of chiding and of challenging

Backbiting and calumny

This was his courtesy

asked for his shrift,

cursing all his enemies.

and of keen words;

in a palsy he seemed,

long in the sun

fouilly louring.

he bit his lips,

he would wreak vengeance

when his time he saw.

was of an adders tongue;

all his living was;

and bearing of false witness,

where'er he showed his face.

“ I would be shiven,” quoth  
this shrew,

“ I would be gladder, by God,

“ Than if I this week had won

“ I have a neighbour near me,

“ Blamed him behind his back,

“ Lied to lords about him,

“ Made his friends his foes,

“ His weal and his good chances

“ Between him and his servants

“ His life and his limbs

“ if for shame I durst.

if Gilbert had a hurt

a wey of Essex cheese.

I have envied him often,

to bring slander on him,

to make him lose his silver,

through my false tongue;

grieve me full sore,

have I made strife,

were lost through my speech.

him I most hate,

as I his friend were;

he is stronger than I.

God knows what I would do.

“ When at market I meet

“ I hail him kindly

“ I dare do no other,

“ Had I mastery and might

and should kneel to the Rood,

as the priest preacheth,

“ When I come to the kirk

“ And pray for the people

“ Then I cry on my knees:  
“ That took away my bowl

‘ Christ give them sorrow,  
and my torn sheet.’

“ Then from the altar  
“ Heyne hath a new coat,  
“ I wish it were mine

I turn my eyes and see—  
and his wife another,  
and all the piece it came from.

“ When men lose I laugh,  
“ When they win I weep,  
“ I deem that they do ill  
“ And if any rebuke me  
“ I would that each man  
“ If one hath more than I  
“ Thus I live loveless  
“ And all my body swelleth

my heart loveth that,  
and wail to think of it,  
when I do far worse,  
I hate him deadly evermore.  
were my servant.  
that angrieth me sore,  
like a vicious dog,  
so bitter is my gall.

“ I blame men behind them  
“ What I hear from Will,  
“ All I know from Watkin,  
“ I make foes of friends

and pray for their mischance;  
I tell it to Watkin,  
Will hears it after.  
through a false and fickle  
tongue;  
as with a tailors shears.  
through many a trick,  
and curse my fellow-Christians

“ I burn myself within me  
“ Through my power of talk,  
“ I take my vengeance  
“ Against Christs counsel.

“ And when I cannot master  
them  
“ That I catch cramp,  
“ Ague or fever,  
“ The leechcraft of our Lord  
“ No clerk can help me  
“ Like the cobbler of South-  
wark  
“ God and His words  
“ Like a chance charm I have;

I take such melancholy,  
and sometimes spasms,  
till I forget  
and believe in the wizards.  
no, nor Christ,

or Dame Em of Shoreditch.  
give me no help  
that chiefly cured me.

“ For many a year I could not eat  
 “ For envy and ill-will  
 “ No sugar nor sweet thing  
 “ Nor any remedy on earth  
 “ No, neither shrift nor shame,  
 “ Yes, there is remedy,” quoth Repentance,  
 “ Sorrow for sin  
 “ I am sorry,” says he,  
 “ That makes me meagre,  
 “ I am a broker of backbiting,  
 “ When he sold and I did not  
 “ To lie and to glower  
 “ Their works and their words,  
 “ Now it grieves me in my mind  
 “ Ere I my life leave, O Lord,  
 “ Grant me, good Lord,

as a man should,  
 be hard things to digest;  
 may assuage my swelling,  
 drive it from my heart,  
 save one should scrape my maw.”  
 and gave him counsel of the best,  
 is salvation of soul.”  
 “ seldom am I not;  
 for I cannot avenge me.  
 I blame mens wares.  
 then was I ready  
 and blame my neighbours,  
 wherever I was.  
 that ever I did so;  
 grant me of thy love,  
 grace of amendment.”

## (WRATH)

Now awoke Wrath  
 With snivelling nose,  
 “ I am Wrath,” quoth he,  
 “ With stone or staff  
 “ Bethinking me of sleights  
 “ Though I sat here seven years  
 “ The harm I have done  
 “ Impatient of all penances,  
 “ And grumbling at His sending

with his two white eyes,  
 and bitten lips.  
 “ I will gladly smite  
 or steal upon my enemy,  
 to slay them slyly,  
 I could not well tell  
 with hand and tongue,  
 complaining of God,  
 when aught grieved me,

“ Sometimes in summer, and sometimes in harvest,  
 “ If weather were not as I then I blamed God.

“ Mid all kinds of men my dwelling is,  
 “ With gentle and simple that love to hear harm.

“ I am Wrath. Once I was a Friar,  
 “ Gardner in the convent, grafting slips;  
 “ I grafted lies on preachers and visitors,  
 “ And the lies bare leaves and blossomed abroad,  
 “ And entered my ladys bower to hear confessions.  
 “ Now comes the fruit.— Men will go shrive them  
 “ To preachers and visitors and not to their parsons,  
 “ Parsons soon see these share their shrift-money,  
 “ Then parsons preach and defame the Friars,  
 “ And Friars blame parsons; all men know it.  
 “ I, Wrath, walk mid all, I teach them from the book of  
 Wrath

“ Both vaunt their spiritual their spiritual power is Wrath,  
 power, and all come to poverty,  
 “ Each contemns the other, and their spiritual power is  
 “ Or else ride about rich, mine.  
 “ I, Wrath, never rest from following these wicked.

“ I have an aunt, a Nun, another an Abbess,  
 “ They would sooner faint or than suffer any penance.  
 die I served the convent,  
 “ I was cook in their kitchen, and many with the monks.  
 “ Many months with them, and for other poor ladies,  
 “ Broth for the prioress I made Thus it went.

“ Broth and soup made out of  
 chatter.

“ Sister Joan was a bastard.

“ Sister Clarice a knights daughter,

her father a cuckold;

“ ‘ Sister Pernell a priestswench, not fit to be prioress;

“ ‘ She bore a child in cherry- time;

“ ‘ They challenged her with it

all the chapter knew it,  
at her election day.’

“ I, Wrath, their pottage made all out of wicked words.

“ ‘ Liar thou art,’ cries one,

“ Each hit the other

“ Had they had knives, by Christ, each had killed the other.

“ All ladies loathe me that love honourable ways.

“ Among wives and widows

I am wont to sit,

“ High fenced in the high pews in church,

“ The parson knoweth well

how I hate Lettice;

“ She took the Sacrament  
before me

and she and I met and chid,  
Off with our clothes,  
and cheeks bloody.

“ Each called the other whore.

“ Heads were bare,

“ Among the monks I might be

but often I shun it,

“ There be so many cruel men

my doings to espy,

“ The Prior, the sub-prior,

and Father abbot,

“ If there I tell my angry tales

they meet and take me

“ And make me fast on Fridays

on bread and water.

“ I am challenged in the chapter

as though I were a child,

“ Birched on the bare back-  
side

and never a shirt between.

“ I have no liking

to live among the monks,

“ They eat more fish than flesh;

they drink feeble ale,

“ And once when wine cometh

and I sit and drink late

“ I have a flux of foul words

for five days after.

“ All the wickedness I know

of any in our convent

“ I cough it up in our cloisters

and all the world hears it.”

“ Repent ye,” quoth Repentance,  
“ The counsel that thou knowest  
“ Nor drink delicate drink,  
“ Lest thy will and thy wit  
“ Be thou sober,” says he,  
And bad him pray to God

“ and never more repeat  
by thy look or by thy speech,  
nor drink deep at all,  
should turn to wrath.  
and gave him absolution  
to be his prospering help.

(COVETOUSNESS OR AVARICE)

Then came Covetise,  
So hungry and hollow  
Beetle-browed, babber-lipped,  
And, like a leather purse,  
Below his chin  
A hood upon his head,  
A tawny cloak upon him,  
All torn and rotten  
But, if a louse could leap away,  
So threadbare was the cloth of it.

him cannot I describe,  
Sir Harveys self he looked;  
with his bleared eyes,  
his cheeks lolled down  
and shivered with age.  
and a lousy hat on top,  
twelve winters old,  
and full of creeping lice;  
she had not been there

“ I have been covetous,” quoth  
this caitiff,

“ I do acknowledge it,

“ Once I served Sim At-stile,  
“ First I learnt to lie,  
“ Then to weigh false  
“ To Winchester and Weyhill  
“ With all kinds of merchandise  
“ But had not grace of Guile  
“ They had been unsold seven  
years,

and was his 'prentice bound,  
a page or two of lies,  
was my second lesson,  
I went to the fair  
as my master bad,  
gone with me and my goods,

Gods my witness.

“ Then I passed to the drapers,  
“ To draw the edges out

to learn my other lessons,  
that the flannel might seem  
longer.

“ Among the rich striped cloths I learned another lesson,  
 “ Threaded them with pack- fastened them together,  
 needles, pinned them down therein,  
 “ Put them in a press, made out—thirteen.

“ My wife was a weaver, woollen cloth she made,  
 “ She spake to her spinners to spin it soft,  
 “ But the pound-weight she weighed a quarter more  
 paid by when I weighed fair.  
 “ Than my own balance did, she brewed it to sell,  
 “ I used to buy her barley, she mixed it together,  
 “ Penny ale and thick ale, *It* lay by itself;  
 “ For labourers and poor folk. or in my bedchamber;  
 “ The best ale in my bower, never bought other,  
 “ Any man that boozed of that and no good measure either  
 “ Fourpence a gallon, In that wife was cunning;  
 “ When it was served in cups. was her true name,  
 “ Rose of the Small Shop these eleven winters.

“ But now I swear, so may I this cheating I will stop,  
 thrive, nor cheat in selling,  
 “ Nevermore will I weigh false, and my wife with me,  
 “ But I will wend me to Wal- to save me from my sins.”

“ And pray to Bromholm cross, didst never restitution make?”

“ Didst ever repent? with a heap of travellers,  
 “ Yes, once I was in an inn, and rifled their packs.”

“ I rose when they were sleep- that was a robbers theft;  
 ing, more than for all thy cheating  
 “ That was no restitution, else.”

“ Thou hadst deserved hanging

“ I thought rifling *was* restitu-  
tion,” says he,  
“ I know no French i’faith,

“ Didst ever use usury,

“ Nay, saving in my youth,  
“ I weighed pence with a  
weight,

“ And lent money on pledge,

“ I wrote me out agreements;  
“ I gat me more wealth

“ I have lent to lords and  
ladies,

“ I lent to folk that were will-  
ing to lose

“ I had bankers letters

“ I counted it right here,

“ Didst ever lend to lords

“ Ay, I have lent to lords;  
“ I have made many a knight  
“ They gave me colours to wear,  
“ Never a pair of gloves

“ Hast thou pitied the poor,

“ Ay, as much pity  
“ Would kill them an they  
catch them,

“ Art thou free among thy  
neighbours

“ I never learned my book;  
only from far Norfolk.”

in all thy lifetime?”

with Lombards and Jews,

I pared the heaviest,  
the pledge was worth more  
than the loan.

if the borrower failed his day,  
than through merciful lending.

and myself redeemed the  
pledge;

a bit from every coin.  
and took my coin to Rome,  
but there it was less.”

in return for their protection?”

they never loved me after;  
into mercer and draper,  
thus they were *my* ’prentices,  
did they pay me for the same.”

who sometimes needs must  
borrow?”

as pedlars have on cats,

for the sake of their skins.”

with thy meat and drink?”

"I am held as courteous as a dog is in a kitchen;  
"That is the name I have among them."

“ God grant thee never  
“ Save thou repent thee soon  
“ God grant thy sons after thee  
“ And thine executors no profit  
“ That which was won by  
    wrong  
“ For neither Pope nor Par-  
    doner  
“ To pardon thee thy sins,  
The sin is not remitted save  
“ Ay, I have won my goods  
“ I have gathered what I have  
“ I mixed my merchandise,  
“ But the best was outside the  
    shop  
“ There was wit in that.

his grace through all thy life,  
and use well thy goods.  
no joy of that thou winnest,  
in that thou leavest them;

shall be spent by the wicked,

hath ever power  
save thou make reparation.”  
restitution be made.

with false word and wit,  
with glosing and with guile;  
I made a fine array,

and the worst inside—

“ And if my neighbour had  
man or beast  
“ I tried many a trick  
“ And, save I got it otherwise,  
“ I shook his purse out  
  
“ If I went to the plough,  
“ A foot or a furrow  
“ If I reaped I would reach  
over,  
“ Seize with their sickles  
  
“ In holy-days at church,  
“ I had no will  
“ Nay, I mourned my loss of  
goods,

better at all than mine,  
to get it for mine own,  
at the last I stole it;  
or I picked his locks.  
  
I pinched of his half-acre,  
of my neighbours land,  
  
or bad them that reaped for me  
what I never sowed.  
  
when I heard mass,  
to weep my sins;  
  
and not my bodys guilt.

“ When I did deadly sin,  
“ As when I lent and thought  
it lost

I feared it not so much,  
when payment was delayed.

“ If I sent my servant  
“ To do traffic with money  
“ No man could comfort me,  
“ Nor penance done,  
“ My mind was on my goods,  
Where your treasure is th

to Bruges or Prussia-land,  
and to make exchange,  
nor mass nor mattins,  
nor paternoster prayed;  
not on Gods grace.  
shall your heart be also.

“ In sooth,” Repentance said,  
“ Were I a Friar, in good faith,  
“ I would take no money of  
thine,  
“ Nor mend our church with  
gold of thine,  
“ By my souls health I would not  
“ For the best book in our  
House,  
“ If I knew thee to be what  
thou sayest  
Better die than live ill.

“ I have pity on thy life,  
for all the gold in earth,  
  
nor robe me in goods of thine,  
nor take a dinners cost from  
thee;  
a penny pittance of thee  
  
tho the leaves were burnt gold;  
  
I would sooner starve.

" I counsel any faithful Friar  
" I would liever, by our Lord,  
" Than have food and finding  
When thou eatest rich food  
Feed on thine own loaf and

never to sit at board of thine,  
live upon watercress  
from a false mans fortune.  
bou art anothers slave ;  
e free.

“ Thou art unnatural;  
“ Make reparation,  
“ All that take of thy goods,  
“ Are bound at the High Judg-  
ment  
“ The priest that taketh tithes  
of thee,  
“ Shall share thy purgatory

I cannot pardon thee.  
and reckon with them all.  
God is my witness,  
to help thee to restore.  
if he know thee what thou art,  
and help to pay thy debt.

“Never workman in this world shall thrive on thy winnings;  
 “Look in the Psalter:  
**For lo thou desiredst truth.**  
 “Then thou shall know fully  
 “And what the priests penance  
     is  
 “For a harlot of her body hire  
 “And shall sooner come to  
     heaven  
 “God be my witness.”

Then that shrew waxed des-  
 pairing

Had not Repentance comforted him thus:

“Have mercy in thy thoughts,  
 “For Gods mercy is more  
 “And all this worlds wicked-

ness,  
 “Is no more to the mercy of God  
 “Thou hast not good enough

    in thee  
 “Saving by penitence,  
 “The goods thou hast gotten  
 “And long as thou livest on

    them  
 “And if thou know not

“Take thy money to the  
     Bishop,  
 “He shall answer for thee  
 “For thee—and many more.”

and would have hanged himself,  
 and in thy prayers pray for it,  
 than all His other works,

that man can work or think,  
 than is a spark in Thames.

to buy thee a wastel cake,  
 or work of thy two hands.  
 began in falsehood,  
 thou payest not but borrowest

    more;  
 to whom to make thy repara-  
     tion,

bid him use it for thy soul;  
 at the High Judgment day,

Now beginneth Gluttony  
 And fare to churchward

to go to shrive him,  
 his sins to show.

### (GLUTTONY)

Forth he went upon his way  
But Betty the brewster  
And asked of him withal

fasting, on a Friday,  
bad him good Morrow,  
whitherward he went.

“I go to church,” says he,  
“And then will I be shriven,

“for to hear mass,  
and I shall no more sin.”

“Gossip,” says she, “I have  
good ale;

wilt taste it, Glutton?”

“What hast thou?” says he,

“any hot spice?”

“Pepper and peony seeds,”  
says she,

“and a pound of garlic,

“And a farthings worth of  
fennel,

for your fasting day.”

Then in goes Glutton

and great oaths welcomed him.

Cis the shoemaker  
Watt the gamekeeper  
Tom the tinker  
Hick the hackneyman,  
Clarice of Cock Lane  
Parson Piers of Pray-to-God  
Daw the ditcher  
A fiddler, a ratter,  
A ropemaker, a trooper,  
A watchman and a hermit,  
Godfrey the garlic seller,  
All early in the morning  
To try the new good ale.

sat on the bench,  
and his wife—drunk;  
and two of his 'prentices,  
Hogg the needler,  
and the parish clerk;  
and Pernel the Flemish woman,  
and a dozen more of them;  
and a Cheapside scavenger,  
and Rose of the Small Shop,  
and the Tyburn hangman;  
Griffin the Welshman,  
welcomed Glutton gladly

Then cobbler Clement  
And said it was for sale  
Hick the hackneyman  
And bad Bet the butcher  
Two then were chosen

threw down his cloak,  
at the New Fair Change.  
threw down his hood,  
be speaker on his side;  
the exchange to value—

He that had the hood  
 The two rose readily,  
 And went aside  
 They could not in their con-  
 science  
 Till Robin the ropemaker  
 And named an umpire  
 Hick the ostler  
 And Clement took Hicks hood  
 And held him satisfied;  
 Sir Glutton should be treated

There was laughing and chat-  
 tering,  
 Bargains and toasts and songs,  
 And Glutton had gulped down

He could neither step nor stand  
 Then gan he walk  
 Now to this side, now to that,  
 Like a man who lays lines  
 And when he drew to the  
 doorstep,  
 He stumbled on the threshold  
 Then Cobbler Clement  
 To lift him up on high  
 But Glutton was a heavy churl  
 And coughed up his drink

With all the trouble in the  
 world  
 Bore him home to his bed  
 And after all this surfeit  
 All Saturday and Sunday slept  
 Then waked he from his  
 winking  
 And the first word he threw was,

should have somewhat with it.—  
 and whispered together,  
 and valued the goods,  
 truly agree;  
 was bidden to arise,  
 that quarrel should be none.  
 took the cloak,  
 and a cup of ale,  
 for if one should repent of it  
 to a gallon of ale.

and, “Pass the cup round,”  
 and so they sat—till evensong,  
 a gallon and a gill.

till he had his staff,  
 like a blind singers dog,  
 and sometimes backward,  
 to catch wild birds;

then his eyes grew dim,  
 and fell flat on the floor;  
 caught him by the waist  
 and get him to his knees;  
 and groaned as he lifted him,  
 in Clements lap.

his wife and his wench  
 and laid him therein;  
 he had a sleeping fit;  
 till the sun went to rest.

and wiped his eyes,  
 “Where’s the tankard?”

His wife and his conscience  
 He waxed ashamed, that shrew,  
 And to Repentance cried,  
 "Thou, Lord, that art on high  
 "To thee, God, I, Glutton,  
 "Guilty of trespass with my  
 tongue,  
 "By Gods soul, By Gods sides,  
 "When there was no need of oath.  
 "I have over eaten at supper-  
 time  
 "More than my body  
 "And then I, Glutton, cast  
 it up  
 "And spoilt what might have  
 well been  
 "Over daintily on fasting days  
 "Sitting so long at table,  
 "Hereof, good God,  
 "Of all my vicious living

Then gan Glutton weep  
 And vowed to fast:  
 "Never shall fish on Friday  
 "Till Aunt Abstinence allows  
 "This showing shrift," says  
 Repentance,

rebuked him for his sin,  
 and swiftly asked for shrift,  
 "Have pity on me,  
 and all lives didst shape,  
 confess me guilty,  
 how oft I cannot tell,  
 So help me God Almighty,'  
 sometimes at breakfast-time,  
 might well digest;  
 ere I had walked a mile,  
 spent upon the hungry.  
 I have eaten and have drunken;  
 I slept and ate at once.  
 grant me forgiveness  
 all my life long."  
 and made great dole,  
 "Hungry and thirsty though  
 I be,  
 be eaten or swallowed  
 whom all my life I hated."  
 "shall be of merit to thee."

(PARSON SLOTH)

Then came Sloth, beslabbered,  
 "I must sit down," says he,  
 "I cannot stand or stoop,  
 "Once I am in bed,  
 "Till I am ripe for dinner."

with two slimy eyes,  
 "or I shall nap,  
 or kneel without a footstool,  
 no bell-ringing can rouse me

He began with a belch  
And stretched him out and  
yawned

“What, wake, man, wake,”  
cried Repentance,

“Should I die, by this day,  
“I know not my paternoster,  
“I know rhymes of Robin  
Hood  
“But of our Lord and of our  
Lady—none,

“I have made forty vows

“Never penance have I done  
“And never was I sorry for my  
“If I tell my beads  
“My heart is two miles away  
“Each day am I busy,  
“With idle tales at the ale,  
“Gods passion and pain

“I never visited the weak  
“I had liever hear loose talk  
“Or laugh at lying tales,  
“Than all that ever they  
wrote,  
“Vigils and fast days  
“I lie abed in Lent  
“Till mattins and mass be  
done.  
“If I hear the last word

“Save sickness makes me  
“Do I confession make,

and beat his breast in penitence  
—and then he snored.

“and haste thee to shrift.”

I dread me sore,  
as the priest sings it,  
and Randolph Earl of Chester,  
not the shortest ever made.

and forgot them in the  
morning,  
as the priest bade me,  
(unless I be in wrath),  
from the words of my mouth;  
holy days and others,  
and idle tales in church.  
on that I think seldom.

or fettered men in prisons,  
at a cobblers merrymaking,  
or slander my neighbour,  
Matthew, Mark, or Luke or  
John.

I can clean forget them all,  
with my leman in my arms,

Then I go to the Friars  
I hold myself satisfied.

not twice in ten years  
and then I tell not half my sins.

“ I have been priest and parson for thirty winters past,  
 “ But I cannot solfa or sing, or read a Latin life of saints;  
 “ But I can find a hare, in a field or in a furrow,  
 “ Better than construe the or explain it to the parish.  
     first Psalm I can cast a shires accounts,  
 “ I can hold a friendly meeting, I cannot read a line.  
 “ But in mass book or Popes edict  
  
 “ If I buy or borrow, unless the score be up against  
     me,  
 “ I forget it as soon as bought; and if a man ask me  
 “ Six times or seven I deny it with oaths.  
 “ Thus have I served true men ten hundred times.  
  
 “ My servants wages go un- it is sad on settling-day,  
     paid,  
 “ When with wrath and wicked my workmen I pay.  
     wish or help me in my need,  
 “ If a man do me service, I cannot understand him.  
 “ I am unkind when he is the manners of a hawk,  
     courteous, there must be meat under the  
 “ I have and always had thumb.  
 “ I am not lured with love;  
  
 “ The kindness my brother- showed me of old,  
     Christian, ay, sixty times have I,  
 “ I, Sloth, have forgotten it, “ By what I said and what I left unsaid.  
  
 “ Many a time have I spoilt fish, flesh, and other food,  
 “ Bread, ale, butter, milk and cheese,  
 “ All wasted by my keeping and I have set my house a-fire.  
     them;  
  
 “ In my youth I ran about, I gave me not to service,

“ And ever since have been a  
beggar, all for my foul sloth,  
“ O me, my barren, barren days.”

“ Repent thee,” quoth Re-  
pentance, and with that Sloth swooned,  
Till Wake the watchman threw water in his eyes  
And flapped it on his face and said:  
“ Beware thee of Despair for he would betray thee,  
“ Say, ‘ I am sorry for my sin,’ pray God for grace and beat  
“ No guilt so great thy breast;  
that His goodness is not  
greater.”

Then sat Sloth up  
And vowed before God:  
“ (Save I be sick),  
“ To the dear church  
“ Nor shall ale after dinner  
“ Till I have heard evensong:

“ Ay and I will pay again  
“ All that I made wickedly  
“ And though my living fail  
“ Every man shall have his  
own,  
“ And with the remnant,  
“ Before I pilgrim it to Rome,

and signed him ever and again,  
“ No Sunday shall go by  
that I shall not early go  
and hear mass and mattins;  
keep me thence,  
by the Cross I swear it.

(if I the money have),  
since I had art to make it;  
yet I will not cease;

ere I go hence.  
by the Chester Rood,  
I will seek—Saint Truth.”

### THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE FOR THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Then had Repentance pity  
“ For all sinful souls  
“ To mend you your misdeeds,  
“ God who of Thy goodness

and bad them all kneel:  
I pray our Saviour,  
to be merciful to all.  
of old made the world,

" Making all out of nothing,  
 " And suffered man to do sin  
 " All for the best as I believe  
 • blessed fault, • necessary  
 " For through that sin thy Son  
 " And became man, son of a  
     maid,  
 " Thou that madest Thyself Thy Son like us in body and soul,  
 I am in the Father and the Father in me and be that seeth  
     me seeth my Father,  
 " Thou that with thy Son  
 " For mans sake on Good  
     Friday  
 The led captivity captive,  
 " When the sun for sorrow  
 " When most light is at mid-  
     day;  
 " At midday mealtime of thy  
     saints  
 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.  
 " The light that leapt from  
     out thee  
 " And brought thy blessed  
     from his power  
 " Thou that on the third day  
     after  
 " Where the sinner Mary saw  
     thee,  
 " For comfort of the sinful  
 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to re-  
     pentance,  
 " All that Mark hath written,  
 " Of thy doughtiest deeds  
 The Word was made flesh,  
     and making man like Thee,  
     and brought sickness on us  
     all—  
     as the Book telleth—  
     sin of Adam,  
     down to this earth was sent  
     mankind to save,  
     in our flesh didst die,  
     and felt our sorrow,  
     lost for a time his light,  
     feeding our forefathers  
     with thy fresh blood,  
     blinded Lucifer,  
     into the bliss of heaven;  
     in our mortal flesh didst go  
     before Mary thy mother,  
     thou sufferedst her to see thee  
     first:  
     Matthew, Luke and John  
     all was done by thee as man;

"Thou to whom therefore we may more surely pray,  
"Thou that wert first our Father and in thy flesh our Brother,  
"And above all our Saviour: BE MERCIFUL TO US.  
"Thou that hast told us when we be sorry  
"For our deeds done ill, if we acknowledge them and cry,  
"Damned we shall be never:  
I will not remember his iniquities any more,  
"Because of this Thy mercy, for the love of Mary Thy mother,  
"Have pity on these wicked men that repent them sore  
"That ever they have angered thee, in word, or thought, or deed."  
Then seized Hope a horn *Lord - thou - shalt - turn - and - quicken-us,*  
And blew it to the sound of *Blessed are they whose iniquity is forgiven,*  
And all the saints in heaven together sang the hymn,  
A thousand men crowded and cried to Christ and his dear mother  
For grace to go to Truth,— God grant they may.



THE VISION OF  
THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH  
AND OF THE  
COMING OF PIERS PLOWMAN



# THE VISION OF THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

BUT no wight was so wise  
They blustered forth like  
beasts,  
Long was the way and late  
In pilgrims dress apparell'd;  
Bound with broad list  
A bowl and bag,  
And on his hat a hundred flasks of lead,  
Many a cross from Sinai,  
Cross-keys from Rome,  
Signs of his pilgrimage,

This folk required of him  
“ From Sinai,” says he,  
“ Bethlehem, Babylon,  
“ Ye may see by my signs,  
“ Good saints have I sought  
“ Walking full wide  
“ Knowest thou a holy saint  
“ Canst thou tell us the way

“ Nay, God bless me,”  
“ Never saw I palmer  
“ That asked after Truth

that knew the way to Truth;  
over the valleys and the hills;  
when they met a palmer,  
he had a staff in hand,  
like bindweed twisted round it,  
he bare at his side,  
scallop-shells of Spain,  
and the portraiture of Christ,  
that men might know his  
saints.

whence he had come;  
“ and from our Lords Sepul-  
chre,  
Alexandria, Armenia, and  
Damascus;  
that be upon my hat,  
for my souls health,  
in wet and dry.”

that men call TRUTH?  
where that saint dwelleth? ”

said the fellow then,  
with pike-staff or with scrip  
till ye now in this place.”

## HERE FIRST APPEARETH PIERS PLOWMAN

“ By Peter,” quoth a plowman, and forward put his head,  
 “ I know Truth as well as scholar does his book.  
 “ Conscience and my own wit led me to his place,  
 “ Made me his man to serve him evermore;  
 “ I have been his follower all this fifty winter,  
 “ Sown his seed, herded his beasts,  
 “ Cared for his corn, carried it home,  
 “ In his house, outside his  
 house, watching his profit;  
 “ I ditch, I dig, I do,  
 “ Now I sow, and now I thresh, all that Truth biddeth me,  
 “ I am his tailor and his tinker, now I weave, now I wind;  
 “ And, though I myself do he put me to learn all;  
 “ And I have good wage from  
 him, I am his good servant,  
 “ He is the readiest paymaster sometimes more than good;  
 “ Never withholds mans hire that poor man can know,  
 “ He is gentle as a lamb, past the evening time.  
 “ If ye will know lovely in speech;  
 “ I will show you the way home. where Truth dwelleth

“ Yea, dear Piers,” quoth they, and offered him money.

“ Nay, by my souls health, for all S. Thomas shrine,  
 “ I would not touch a farthing, for were it told to Truth  
 “ He would love me less a long time after.  
 “ But if ye will to go right, this is the way thither.

“ Ye must go through meek- ness, all, men and women,  
 “ Till ye come to *Conscience-Love-first-our-Lord-God*  
 “ *And-then-your-neighbour-next-and-as-you-would-*  
 “ *That-he-should-do-to-you-do-ye-to-him.*  
 “ Bend by a brook, *Be-sweet-of-speech*

“ And find a ford  
“ Wade in the water,  
“ And ye shall leap the nimbler  
“ Then shalt thou see *Swear-not-save-it-be-for-need.*  
“ Swear ye not idly  
“ Then shall ye come by a croft,  
“ It is called *Covet-not-mens-goods-or-wives-or-servants.*  
“ Break no branch there,  
“ Two stocks stand there,  
“ Strike forth by both

“ Turn at a hill,  
“ It is closed in with florins  
“ Pluck no plant there

“ Then shalt thou see *Say-sooth-*

“ Thou shalt come to a court  
“ The moat around is mercy,  
“ The walls of Wit  
“ The Creed its buttress,  
“ Halls and chambers  
“ The drawbridge of prayer,  
“ The door-hooks are of alms.

“ The gatekeeper is Grace,  
“ Give him this token

“ I HAVE PERFORMED MY  
PENANCE,  
“ AND SHALL BE WHEN I  
THINK ON THEM

“ Bid Amendment ask his Lord  
“ To open and undo  
“ That Adam and Eve  
By Eve the door was sbut to all, and by the Virgin Mary  
it again was opened.

*Honour-your-father*  
wash you well there,  
all your life after.  
by the name of God Almighty.  
enter not therein,  
save it be thine own.  
*Steal-not, Slay-not,*  
and leave them on thy left.

*Bear-no-false-witness*  
and many another fee:  
on peril of thy soul.

*and-nothing-else-for-any-man.*

as bright as the sun,  
the battlements of Christen-  
dom,  
to hold Lust out,  
and all the house is roofed,  
not with lead but with Love;  
the pillars of penance,

his man is Amendment;  
TRUTH-KNOWS-SOOTH

I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS,

THOUGH I WERE A POPE,

to lift the wicket up  
the high gate of heaven  
against us all shut.

“ A full loyal lady  
 “ She hath the key of the lock,  
 “ And may lead in whom she  
 will

“ And if God grant thee  
 “ Thou shalt find Truth  
 “ In a chain of charity  
 “ But beware of Wrath,  
 “ For he curseth him  
 “ And poketh in pride  
 “ Thy good deeds make thee  
 bold,  
 “ Then shalt thou be driven  
 forth,  
 “ Keyed and locked,  
 “ Haply a hundred winter  
 “ Think well of thyself

“ But there are seven sisters  
 “ Porters of the Posterns;  
 “ Humility, Charity, Chastity  
 “ Patience and Peace  
 “ Lady Almsgiving  
 “ She hath helped a thousand  
 “ Whoso is akin  
 “ Wondrous welcome is he  
 “ Who is not akin  
 “ It is full hard for you

“ By Christ,” says a cut-purse,  
 “ Nor I,” says a monkey-man,  
 “ God help me,” says a cake-  
 maker,  
 “ No foot further would I go

“ Yea,” says Piers, “ go ye on,”  
 “ Mercy is a maiden there,

unlocked it by her grace,  
 tho the king slept,  
 as her love pleaseth her.

to go in in this wise,  
 resting in thine heart,  
 as tho thou wert a child;  
 he is a wicked one,  
 that in thy heart is sealed,  
 to make thee praise thyself.

thine eyes are blinded,  
 and the door closed,  
 to keep thee out.  
 ere thou shalt enter;  
 and thou mayst lose his love.

ever serving Truth  
 one called Abstinence,  
 be the chief maidens there;  
 help many a one,  
 lets in full many;  
 from the devils pinfold;  
 to these sisters seven  
 and receivèd well;  
 to some of them  
 to get entrance at the gate.”

“ no kin have I there,”  
 “ for aught I know.”

“ if I knew this for true  
 for any friars sermon.”

and pushed all the right way:  
 mightiest of them all;

“ She is akin to all the sinful,  
 “ And through their help  
 “ Thou mayst get her grace

she and her son,  
 —hope thou none other—  
 if thou go but in time.”

“ Yea, I have bought a house,”  
 quoth one,  
 “ To see how it pleaseth me.”  
 Another needs must follow  
 “ And I must go at once  
 “ Therefore, I pray you, Piers,  
 “ Tell Truth I am excused.”  
 “ And I have wedded a wife,”  
 says one,

“ and I must hie me thither  
 He took his leave of Piers.  
 five yoke of oxen,  
 and drive them straight;  
 if perchance ye meet him

“ Were I a sevennight from  
 her sight  
 “ And lour on me and lightly  
 chide  
 “ Therefore, Piers Plowman,  
 “ I cannot come for Kits sake,

“ wanton in her ways,  
 she would fall into sin,  
 and say I love another;  
 I pray thee tell Truth  
 she cleaveth so to me.”

Quoth Contemplation,  
 “ Famine and trouble,  
 “ But the way is so bad  
 “ To follow us each foot

“ Though I suffer woe,  
 I will follow Piers,  
 unless we had a guide  
 for dread of mis-turnings.”

“ By S. Paul,” says a Pardoner,  
 “ I will go fetch my box of  
 writing

“ perchance I am not known  
 there;  
 and my bishops letters.”

“ By Christ,” says a woman of  
 the streets,  
 “ Thou shalt say I am sister of  
 thine

“ I will come in thy company;

(She looks round and sees they two are alone)

“ I know not where they be  
 gone.”



THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL  
TO THE PILGRIMS OF TRUTH



## THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL

THEN says Perkin Plowman:  
“ I have half-an-acre to plough  
“ Had I ploughed my half-acre  
“ I would wend with you,

“ That were a long waiting  
time,”

“ What should we women

“ Some shall sew the sacks,  
“ And ye wives that have wool,  
“ And spin it speedily,  
“ Save it be holiday  
“ Look forth your linen,  
“ See the needy and the naked,  
“ Throw clothes upon them,  
“ For I shall give the poor a  
living  
“ For the Lords love in heaven,

“ And ye lovely ladies,  
“ Take silk and sendal,  
“ Chasubles for chaplains

“ Wives and widows,  
“ Make cloth, I counsel you,  
“ Conscience biddeth you  
“ For the profit of the poor  
“ And for all manner men  
“ Help them to work well,

“ By S. Peter of Rome  
by the high way;  
and sown it afterward,  
I would show you the way.”

said a veiled lady,  
work meanwhile? ”

for fear the wheat be spilt,  
work it fast,  
spare not your fingers,  
or a saints vigil.  
labour ye hard on it,  
take thought how *they* lie;  
Truth would love that,

as long as I live  
unless the land fail.

with your long fingers,  
and sew while there be time  
the churches to honour.

spin your flax and wool,  
and teach your daughters so,  
to make the cloth  
and for pleasure to yourselves,  
that live by meat and drink  
who win your food for you.”

“ By Christ,” says a gentle-  
man,  
“ But on this theme truly  
“ But lead me,” says he,  
“ I will help thee labour

“ he teacheth us the best,  
never was I taught,  
“ and I will learn to plough  
while my life lasteth.”

“ Surely, Sir Knight,  
“ And all my life  
“ If thou wilt keep  
“ From the wasters and the  
wicked  
“ Go thou and hunt  
“ The boars and badgers,  
“ And tame thy falcons  
“ That come to my croft  
Courteously the knight replied:  
“ By my power, Piers,  
“ To fulfil the covenant

I shall toil for both of us,  
will labour for love of thee,  
my church and me

that would us destroy.  
the hares and foxes,  
that break my hedges down;  
wild birds to kill,  
and crop my wheat.”

I plight thee my troth,  
while I may stand.”

“ But yet one point,” says  
Piers,  
“ Trouble not thy tenants,  
“ And though ye be right to  
fine  
“ And let meekness be your  
master  
“ And though the poor proffer  
you  
“ Take them not; perchance  
“ Thou shall pay it all again  
“ In the full perilous place

“ I ask thee more;  
save Truth assenteth,  
let mercy be your tax-master,

for all that Meed may do;  
presents and gifts  
ye do not them deserve:  
at the years end,  
named Purgatory.

“ Do no harm to thy bondman,  
“ He is here thine underling,  
“ He may be better set  
“ Save thou do work  
Friend, go up higher.

that it be well with thee,  
but it may hap in heaven  
and happier too than thou,  
and live as thou shouldst.

“ At church and in the charnel  
    vault  
“ Or whether one be Queen or  
    quean  
“ Be thou true of thy tongue,  
“ Save of wisdom and sense  
“ Tales of kindness  
“ Hold not with the loose  
    storiers,  
“ Avoid them at thy meat  
    time.  
“ I assent,” says the knight,  
“ And I,” says Piers, “ shall  
    apparel me  
“ And wend with you I will  
“ I will cast clothes on me,  
“ My stockings, my cuffs,  
“ And hang my basket round  
    my neck,  
“ And a bushel of bread-corn within.  
“ I will sow it myself,  
“ On pilgrimage, as palmers do,  
“ My ploughfoot shall my pike-  
    staff be,  
“ And help my hoe to cut  
“ And all that help me plough  
“ Shall have leave by our Lord  
“ And make merry with their  
    winning,  
“ And all kind of craftsmen  
“ I will find them food  
“ Saving Jack the Juggler,

churhls be hard to tell  
knight or knave.  
and hate all tales,  
to chasten thy workmen,  
of battles or of Truth.  
they are the devils talkers;  
Dost thou understand?”  
“ while my life dureth.”  
in pilgrims wise,  
till we find Truth,  
mended and clouted,  
for the cold of my nails,  
by way of pilgrims scrip,  
and then with you will wend  
my pardon to win.  
to pick the roots in two,  
and cleanse the furrows.  
and weed  
to come and glean after me,  
let him grudge who will.  
that can live by Truth,  
who live faithfully,—  
and Janet of the Stews,

“ And the ribald Robert for his filthy words,  
“ And Friar the beggar, and Daniel the dicer,  
“ Truth told me once and bad me tell it after him.”  
They shall be blotted from the book of life.  
“ No tithe shall be taken, no tithe be asked of them  
They shall not be written with the righteous.  
“ They are in luck; they need  
not pay; God mend them.

“ Now am I old and hoar, I have goods of my own,  
“ On pilgrimage and in penance will I pass with all these others  
“ And, ere I wend, will write my will and testa-  
ment.”

# THE TESTAMENT OF PIERS PLOWMAN

“In the name of God, amen, I make this testament myself.

“ He shall have my soul,  
“ And defend it from the Fiend,  
“ Till I come to his account,  
“ And gain forgiveness of my  
debts  
“ On that remission I believe.

that all souls made,  
for so is my faith,  
as my Creed telleth me,  
  
and remission of my sins;

“ The Church shall have my  
body  
“ Of my corn and of my sub-  
stance;  
“ I paid her readily,  
“ She is bound, I hope,  
“ And keep me in her memory.

and shall keep my bones,  
I paid her my tithes,  
for peril of my soul;  
to bear me in mind,  
with all Christian souls.

" My wife shall have that I  
earned,  
" And share it with my friends,  
" Though I should die to-day,

earned with truth and no more,  
and my dear children.  
my debts are paid;

“ I bare back all I borrowed  
 “ And with the residue,  
 “ I will honour Truth with it  
 “ For poor mens sake.”

Now are Piers and the pilgrims  
 To plough his half-acre;  
 Ditchers and delvers  
 Thereat was Piers pleased  
 Others there were  
 Each man in his way  
 And some to please Perkin

At high prime Piers  
 And himself looked over all  
 He should be hired again

Some did their work thus;  
 And helped to plough the half-  
 acre

“ Now by the prince of  
 Paradise,”  
 “ If ye rise not straightway  
 “ No grain that groweth here  
 “ Nay though ye die for dole

Then were idlers afeard,  
 Some crooked their legs beneath  
 them,  
 And made their moan to Piers

“ But, Piers, we will pray for  
 you,  
 “ That God in His grace  
 “ And pay you back for all  
 your alms  
 “ We, we can neither toil nor  
 sweat,

ere I went home to bed,  
 by Chester Rood,  
 and be his pilgrim at the plough,

to the ploughing gone,  
 many a one helped him,  
 dug up the ridges,  
 and paid their full wages.  
 that worked full willingly,  
 found him work to do,  
 picked away the weeds.

let the plough stand  
 to see who best had wrought,  
 in harvest time.

they sat and sang and drank,  
 with, “ Hey trolly lolly.”

says Piers in his wrath,  
 and haste you to work,  
 shall gladden you at need,  
 —devil take him that cares.”

and feigned them to be blind,  
 as such beggars can,  
 how that they *could* not work.

for you and for your plough,  
 will multiply your grain,  
 that you have given us here;  
 such sickness aileth us.”

“ If ye were good,” says Piers, “ your prayers might help me well,

“ But high Truth will have no tricks

“ Ye be wastrels, I know well,

“ All that good land-tilling men

“ But Truth shall teach you

“ Or barley bread shall be your food

in folk that go a-begging.

wasting and devouring

lawfully toil for.

how to drive his team:—

and the brook give you drink.

“ But if any be blind,

“ He shall eat wheaten bread,

“ Till God in his goodness

broken-shanked, iron-bolted,  
and drink as well as I,  
send him better days.”

“ But ye, ye *could* work as Truth would; ye *could* earn meat and drink,

“ Keeping kine in the field,

“ Ditching and delving,

“ Helping to make mortar,

keeping beasts from the corn,  
threshing the sheaves,  
or bearing muck afield.

“ In lechery, in lying,

“ And only through sufferance

“ Hermits and anchorites,

“ They shall have of my alms

“ And friars that flatter not,

“ What! I and mine shall find them

and in sloth ye live,  
doth Vengeance pass you by.  
that keep them in their cells,  
all the while I live,  
and poor sick folks,

all that they need.

he shall have nought of me

and have the bishops leave,

and make themselves at ease,  
that hath no certain pay.”

“ But Robert Gadabout

“ Nor preachers, saving they  
can preach

“ They shall have bread and  
pottage

“ Religion is unreasonable

Then gan a wastrel rise in  
wrath

and would have fought with  
Piers,

Threw down his glove,  
Bad Piers go with his plough

“ Wilt thou or wilt thou not,  
“ Of thy flour and of thy flesh,  
“ Ay and make merry with it

Then PIERS PLOWMAN  
To keep him as his covenant  
was

“ Avenge me of these wastrels  
“ There be no plenty in the  
land

Courteously the knight,  
Warned wastrels all  
“ Or thou shalt dear aby it,  
“ I shall beat thee by the law  
“ I was not wont to work,”  
says Wastrel,  
Made light of the law,  
Piers was worth a peascod,  
And threatened Piers and his  
men

“ By my souls peril,”  
“ I will repay you all  
And shouted after Hunger,  
“ Take vengeance on these  
wastrels,

Hunger came in haste,  
Wrung him by the womb,

He buffeted the Breton man  
That he looked like a lantern  
He beat both the boys,

a Breton man, a braggart,  
for a cursèd starveling.

we will have our will  
will take it when we please,  
for all thy grudging.”

complained him to the knight,  
from the wolfish wastrels:  
that make the world so dear,  
and the plough lieth still.”

as his manner was,  
and bad them do better:  
by my knightly order,  
and bring thee to the stocks.”

“ and I will not begin.”  
set less by the knight,  
he and his plough,

when next they met,

says PIERS PLOWMAN,  
for your proud words,”  
(Hunger heard him soon),

for the knight will not.”

took Wastrel by the mouth,  
brought water to his eyes.

about both his cheeks,  
all his life after.  
he near burst their ribs.

Had not Piers with a pease loaf    prayed Hunger cease  
They had like been in their graves.

“ Have mercy on them, Hunger,  
“ Suffer them to live,  
“ What was baked for my horses  
and let me boil them beans,  
and let them eat with hogs;  
shall be their food.”

Idlers for fear of this  
Flapped away with flails,  
That Hunger was not bold  
enough

For a potful of peases  
A heap of hermits  
Cut their copes away,  
Went out as workmen  
Digging and ditching;  
Spaded, spread dung,

Blind and bedridden  
Lame men he cured  
They that lay broken legged,  
On soft warm Sundays  
Them Hunger healed

Lame mens limbs  
They became servants  
And prayed for charity  
For the sake of his bread  
For what was baked for the  
horses  
And many a beggar ready  
And every poor man well paid  
Ready as a sparrowhawk

Piers was proud of that  
Daubing and delving,  
Gave them meat and money  
Then had Piers pity

fled into barns,  
from morning to evening,

to cast an eye on them  
that Piers wife made them.  
took them spades,  
made them short coats,  
to weed and mow,

to drive Hunger away.

were healed by the thousand,  
with lungs of beasts;  
sitting to beg silver,  
by the high way,  
with a red-hot cake.

were loosened and lithe;  
to keep Piers beasts,  
to dwell with him,  
to drive Hunger away.

was food for the hungry,  
to sweat for beans,  
to take pease for his hire,  
to do Piers bidding.

and put them all to work,  
whittling wooden pins,  
as they might deserve;  
on all poor people,

And bade Hunger in haste  
Home to his own place  
"I am well avenged," says he,

" Yet I pray thee  
" What is best to be done  
" For well I wot when thou  
    art gone  
" Mischief it maketh,  
" For default of food,  
" Not for love do they work

" There is no final love in them  
" Yet be they my brethren,  
" Truth taught me once  
" And help them in all things  
" Now would I know of thee  
" How I may master them

" Hear now," quoth Hunger,  
" Bold and big beggars  
" Thin them down with beans  
" And if the men grumble  
" The sweeter shall their  
    supper be

" And if thou find any folk  
" Or fire or evil men,  
" Comfort them with thy  
    goods,  
" Love them, lend to them,  
Bear ye one anothers burdens.

" And all kind of men  
" Love them and blame them  
    not

hie out of the land,  
and keep him ever there,  
" on wastrels through thy  
    power,  
ere thou wend  
with bidders and beggars  
ill will they work.  
for now they be so weak,  
this folk is at my will.  
but for fear of famine.

for all their fair speeches,  
God bought us all.  
to love each one of them  
after their need.  
what were the best,  
and make them work."

" and hold my words for  
    wisdom,  
that well can work  
with horse bread and hounds  
    bread,  
bid them to work  
when they have earned it.

that ill fortune hath harmed,  
try such to know;  
for Christs love in heaven,  
Gods law teacheth so.

in mischief and disease,  
—let God take vengeance—

“ Though they have evil done —let God alone for that—  
**Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.**

“ And if thou wilt be dear to  
 God do as the Gospel teacheth.

“ Make thee loved among the  
 lowly so shalt thou get grace;  
**Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteous-  
 ness.**

“ God I would not grieve,” said Piers, “ for all the gold in earth,  
 “ May I do as thou sayest and yet sinless be? ”

“ Yea, I bid thee,” says Hunger, “ or else the Bible lieth,  
 “ Go to Genesis the beginning the father of us all.”  
**With swynk and swot**  
**Toil thou and travel** and sweating face  
 and truly win thy living.

“ And Wisdom saith the same I saw it in the Bible.  
**The sluggard would not plough for sloth; he shall beg in  
 winter and it shall not be given him.**

“ Matthew with a mans face tells of one that lent,  
 “ To three manner of men to traffick with, to profit by,  
 “ And he that best laboured was best allowed,  
 “ And for his labouring was lord of his lords goods,  
 “ The wicked servant had a but as he would not work  
 talent ever more after.  
 “ Nothing had he of his master

“ Common sense wills that every wight should work  
 “ In ditching or in digging, in teaching or in prayer,  
 “ Life active or life contemplative.

“ The man that feedeth him- in faithful labour  
 self in body and in soul.”

“ He is blessed by the Book For thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands, etcetera.

“ By Christ,” quoth Piers the Plowman, “ these sentences will I show

“ To the beggars and the boys  
 “ But yet I pray you of your  
     charity  
 “ Teach it me, my dear,  
 “ Work not for a whole week

“ Ye have eaten over much,”  
     quoth Hunger,  
 “ I bid thee drink no day  
 “ And eat not I bid thee  
 “ And send thee his sauce  
 “ Keep some till supper time,  
 “ Arise ere appetite

“ Let not lord surfeit  
 “ For he is lecherous  
 “ And after many kinds of meat

“ Dives for his delicate life  
 “ And Lazarus the lean  
 “ (And yet he gat them not,  
 “ Yet, since, I saw him sit,  
 “ In all manner of ease,  
 “ And if thou be a man of  
     power,

“ To all that cry at thy gate  
 “ Give them of thy bread,  
 “ Give them of thy loaf,

“ And though liars and latch-  
     lifters  
 “ Let them bide till the board  
 “ But bear no crumbs to them,  
 “ Till thy needy neighbours  
 “ If thus thou diet thee  
 “ Physick shall sell his furred  
     hood

that are so loth to work;  
 if ye know any leechcraft,  
 for some of my servants  
 so much our body acheth.”

“ that maketh you groan,  
 ere thou have somewhat eaten,  
 ere hunger take thee;  
 to taste with thy lips,  
 sit not too long,  
 hath gotten his fill.

sit down at thy table,  
 and of lickerish tongue,  
 he is an-hungerd still,

to the devil went,  
 that longèd for the crumbs,  
 for I, Hunger, killed him),  
 as he a Lord were,  
 in Abrahams lap;

Piers, I counsel thee,  
 for food for love of God,  
 thy pottage and thy sauce,  
 yea, though thou have less to  
 chew,

and lollers go on knocking  
 be put aside,

have made their meal.  
 I will wager both mine ears

to get him food withal,

“ And shall pawn for his dinner  
 “ And be fain to let his physick  
     go  
 “ For many doctors be mur-  
     derers  
 “ And men die through their  
     drinks

“ By S. Paul,” quoth Piers,  
 “ Wend thy way when thou  
     wilt  
 “ This is a lovely lesson,  
 “ I will not hence,” says  
     Hunger,

Says Piers “ I have no penny  
 “ No, neither goose nor pig,  
 “ A few curds, a little cream,  
 “ And two loaves of beans and  
     bran  
 “ And, by my soul, I say  
 “ No nor a cookboy  
 “ But I have parsley, cabbage,  
     leeks  
 “ And a mare to draw the dung  
     afield  
 “ And on this living we must  
     live  
 “ By then I hope to have  
 “ Then may I do thee thy  
     dinner  
 But all the poor people  
 Their beans and baken apples,  
 Onions and salads,  
 And prepared Piers this present

his Italian cloak,  
 and labour with his hands;  
 (God mend them)  
 ere destiny would have it.”

“ thou pointest nigh the truth,  
 and be it well with thee;  
 Lord grant thee recompence.”

“ ere I have dined and drunk.”

pullets for to buy,  
 but only two green cheeses,  
 and a haver-cake,  
 baked for my little ones;  
 I have no salt bacon,  
 collops to make,  
 and a cow and a calf,  
 while the drought lasteth;  
 till Lammas time,  
 harvest in my croft,  
 as I fain would do.”  
 fetched their peascods,  
 they brought them in their  
     laps,  
 and many ripe cherries,  
 to please Hunger withal.

Hunger ate it all in haste,  
Then poor people for fear  
With pease and green onions

and asked for more,  
fed Hunger gladly;  
they thought to poison him.

By this it came near harvest  
time,  
Then folk were fain  
With good ale as Glutton bad,

new corn was in the market,  
feed Hunger with the best,  
and made Hunger go sleep.

Then would not the wastrels  
work  
Nor would beggars eat  
But stamped bread, fine bread,  
They would no halfpenny ale,

but wandered about,  
bread with beans in it,  
clean wheaten bread;  
but of the best and brownest.

Labourers with no land  
Deigned not to dine  
No penny a gallon did for them  
But pork, fish or fresh flesh,  
And that *chaud, plus chaud*,

but only their hands work  
on day-old vegetables;  
nor a piece of bacon,  
fried or baked,  
for the chill of their maw.

And but he has high wages  
And bewail the day

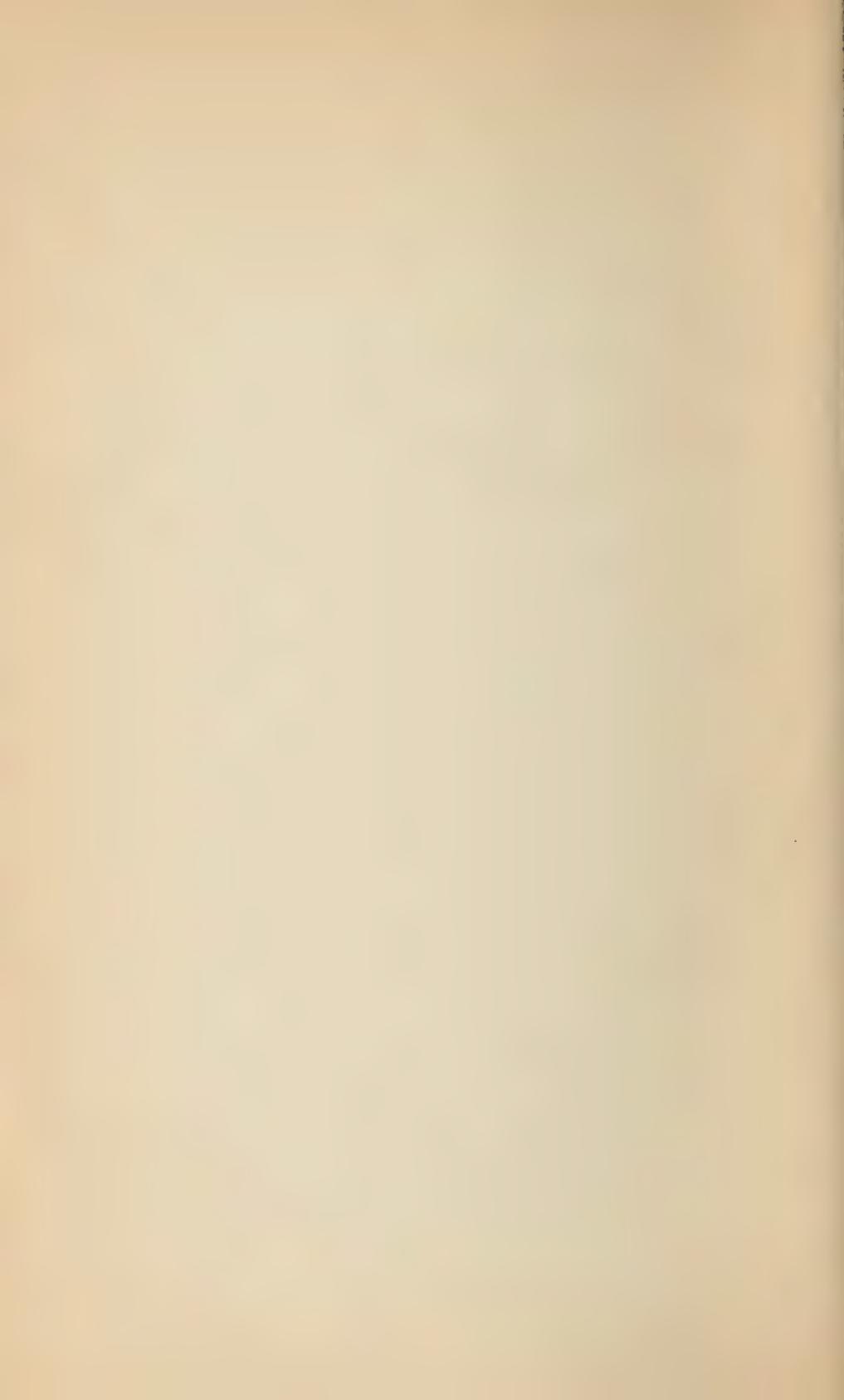
else will he chide,  
he ever became a working  
man;  
and all his Parliament,  
to keep the labourer down.

Curses the king with a will,  
That make such laws  
  
But while Hunger here was  
lord  
Nor strive against the statute  
book,  
But I warn you all ye workmen  
Hunger is fast coming  
Hunger shall wake and come  
with floods  
Ere few years are fulfilled

none then would chide,  
so stern did Hunger look.  
earn while ye can,  
hitherward again;  
  
to chasten the wastrel,  
famine shall arise.

So saith Saturn and sent me to warn you  
WHEN YE SEE THE SUN  
AMISS, AND TWO MONKS HEADS,  
AND A MAIDEN BE QUEEN, THEN MULTIPLY BY  
EIGHT,  
THE PLAGUE SHALL GO  
AWAY HOME, DEARTH SHALL BE JUDGE,  
AND DAN THE DITCHER SHALL DIE FOR HUNGER,  
SAVE GOD IN HIS GOOD-  
NESS GRANT US A TRUCE.

THE VISION  
OF  
GODS BULL OF PARDON



# THE VISION OF GODS BULL OF PARDON

TRUTH heard tell of all  
And bid him take his team  
And brought him a Pardon,  
For Piers and for Piers heirs  
“ Bide thou at home,” said  
Truth,  
And all that should help Piers  
Or do aught else,  
To them Truth granted;

Kings and knights  
Who rule the people  
They have Pardon too,  
And fellowship in paradise

And consecrated bishops,  
If they preach to the people

And, if they can, amend  
And dread no lords,  
And are bitter on bad men,  
And fear not to put down,  
Lechery among lords  
They are one with the apostles;

And they sit on the high  
thrones

And merchants—in the margin

he sent to Piers  
and till the earth  
Pardon and forgiveness,  
for evermore.

“ and plough thy field; ”  
to set or sow  
Pardon perpetual  
PARDON,—WITH PIERS.

that Holy Church defend,  
in their realms righteously,  
light purgatory,  
with patriarchs and prophets.

if their lives be holy,  
to love God and their neigh-  
bour,  
all sinful souls,  
and are mild to the good,  
unless they repent,  
as far as they may,  
and their evil ways,  
PIERS PARDON PROVES  
IT,

at the Judgment Day.

—had many a year remitted,

But no full pardon

(the Pope granted them not that)

And why? They keep not holy days

as they are bidden,  
God help me it is so,"  
and their clean consciences defile.

They swear, " By my soul,

And sell their goods with oaths

But under secret seal

Truth sent them a letter:  
buy when ye will,  
and take your winnings,  
to rebuild almshouses,  
to help the stricken,  
or make them nuns,  
and mend the bad road,  
and make rents reasonable,  
Michael my archangel,

" Buy your goods boldly,  
" And sell when ye will,  
" But use ye your winnings  
" To maintain the scholar,  
" To dower girls  
" To build the broken bridge,  
" To help the monks,  
" And I will send you  
" And never a fiend shall  
frighten you  
" For I will save you  
" And bring your souls in  
safety

or harm you at your death;  
from all despair,

to my saints in joy."

and wept for gladness,  
for the Pardon he had gotten.

Then were merchants merry  
And praised Piers Plowman

The least pardon of all  
Who pleaded for bribes

Lawyers should take pains to  
plead

And princes and bishops  
Thou shalt not take gifts upon the innocent.

had the Men of Law,  
and condemned the innocent.

for the innocent and help them  
should pay the lawyers fee.

But many a magistrate,  
Will do more for John  
But a lawyer that spendeth his  
speech

and many a jury,  
than for Gods love,  
and speaketh for the poor

The innocent and needy poor  
Who comforteth the poor  
And declareth law  
No devil on his deathbed  
The Psalter beareth witness,  
**Lord, who shall dwell . . .**

For who would buy or sell  
These four our Heavenly Father  
Treasures of Truth  
And never shall they wax or  
wane

Ye who plead for the poor  
Ye lawyers, ye advocates,  
When ye draw near to death,  
Your pardon at your parting  
hence

S. Matthew bids me tell you  
this

Whatev'er ye would that men should do to you, do ye  
also unto them.

But for all that labour for their lives,  
Fair work, fair wages,  
These have the Pardon per-  
petual

Tramps and beggars,  
Except their beggary be true,  
Else they be false as hell,  
And beguile the giver,  
Would give to the poor indeed  
Cato knoweth these men well  
See to whom thou givest.

that never hath harmed any,  
and taketh no fee,  
for our Lords love,  
shall have him a whit,  
he and his soul are safe.

water, wind, or wit, or fire,  
gave to his sheep for common  
use,  
the true to help,  
save by Gods will.

and take money at their hands,  
be sure of this;  
and pray for pardon,  
will be but small;

and if I lie blame *him*.

PIERS PLOWMANS PAR-

DON.

nay, their names are not  
there,  
and their plea fair,  
and they defraud the needy,  
who, if he knew the truth,  
and help the neediest of all.  
and the master of stories

And again  
Keep thine alms in thine hand and watch to whom thou  
givest

Ye know not who is worthy,  
The treason is in him that  
taketh,  
For the giver giveth,  
Beggars are ever borrowers,  
Who giveth to them that gave  
Why didst thou not give my  
God knoweth who hath need;  
if treason be,  
and the beggar borroweth,  
their surety is almighty God,  
—and their interest—  
money to the bank . . . ?

Beg not, beggars,  
Whoso hath money to buy him  
bread, save ye have great need,  
he hath enough.

The neediest are our neighbours  
Prisoners in the dungeon,  
Charged with a crew of children  
What they win by their spinning

Milk and meal,  
The babes that continually  
This they must spend  
Ay and themselves  
With woe in winter  
In the narrow room  
Carding, combing, clouting,  
washing,  
Pitiful is it to read  
Ay and many another  
Ashamed to beg,

bad us give to all  
for Him that gave us all.

God knoweth who hath need;  
if treason be,  
and the beggar borroweth,  
their surety is almighty God,  
*—and their interest—*  
money to the bank . . . ?

save ye have great need,  
he hath enough.

if we give heed to them,  
the poor in the cottage,  
and with a landlords rent.

to make their porridge with,  
to satisfy the babes,—  
cry for food—  
on the rent of their houses,  
suffer with hunger,  
rising a-nights,  
to rock the cradle,  
rubbing, winding and peeling  
of rushes.

the cottage-womens woe,  
that puts a good face on it,  
ashamed to let neighbours  
know

All that they need,  
Many the children,  
To clothe and feed them;  
And many mouths

Bread and thin ale  
Cold flesh and cold fish  
A farthings worth of mussels,  
Were a feast for them  
It were charity to help these  
To comfort the cottager,

But for beggars with their bags,  
Save they be blind or broken,  
Reck not, ye rich,  
For every man that hath his health  
If he useth a lollers life

Yet are there other beggars,  
But they want wit,  
Lunatic lollers,  
Mad as the moon changes,  
Caring for neither cold nor  
heat,  
As Peter and Paul wandered  
But many a time prophesying,  
Yet since God is strong enough  
To give to each man  
And lets them go, these lunatics,  
His apostles,  
He sent them silverless,  
With neither bread nor baggage.  
Barefoot go these disciples,  
If they meet the mayor  
They reverence him not,  
Such men we should have

home,

noontide and evening.  
and nought but a mans hands  
and few pennies come in,  
to eat the pennies up.

for them are a banquet,  
are like roast venison,  
a farthings worth of cockles  
on Friday or fast-days,  
that be at heavy charges,  
the crooked and the blind.

whose churches are the taverns,  
or else sick,  
but let such wastrels starve;  
For every man that hath his health,  
his eyes and his limbs  
he liveth against Gods law.

in health enow,  
men and women,  
leaping around,  
witless, moneyless,

wandering walkers,  
yet preaching not,  
to please themselves it seems.

wit, wealth and health,  
they are, I think,  
his private disciples;  
in summer raiment clad,

begging of men,  
amidst the street,  
no, no more than another.

and help them when they come.

They are merry singers,  
Gods boys, jesters,  
**If any man is seen to be wise let him be made a fool that  
be be wise.**

It is the way of the rich  
For the lords and ladies sake  
Men suffer all they say  
Ay and give them gifts and  
gold,  
Right so, ye rich,  
Gods minstrels, Gods mes-  
sengers  
These lunatic lollers  
For under Gods secret seal

They carry no bags,  
They are not like the lollers  
Slyly lurking  
Hoping to sit at eventide  
Uncross their legs  
Resting them, roasting them,  
Drinking to the last drop,  
And when they will and please,  
And, when they rise, roam out,  
Where they may get a break-  
fast,  
Silver or sod meat  
A loaf, half a loaf,  
And home they carry it  
And live in idleness  
Every fellow of their flock  
Bag at his back,  
And yet knows some kind of  
craft,  
Could get him bread and ale  
And yet lives like a loller

heavens minstrels,  
as the Bible saith;  
to keep all manner of minstrels,  
in whose house they stay,  
and take it in good part,  
ere they go thence,  
ye should welcome and honour  
and Gods merry jesters.  
that leap around you  
hidden are their sins.

they hide no bottles,  
and the hermits false,  
to catch mens alms.  
by the house fire,  
and lie at their ease,  
turning round to the fire,  
slowly turning to bed,  
in morning to arise,  
and easily espy

first a round of bacon,  
and sometimes both,  
a lump of cheese,  
to their hovels  
while others work.  
that wanders about,  
beggar-fashion,

which, if he would,  
and a suit of raiment  
—Gods law damns him.

“ Lollers living in sloth,  
 “ Are not in my Pardon  
 “ The Book blameth all beg-  
     gary,

I have been young and now  
     the righteous forsaken or

It needeth none

And tell these lollers

It blameth all beggars,

They live in no love,

They wed no women

They bring forth bastards,

They break a child's back,

And go a-begging with infants

There are more mis-shapen

Than in all other trades

They that live this life  
 In penance or in prayer.

But old white-headed men,  
 And women with child,  
 The blind, the bed-ridden,  
 And all poor sufferers,  
 Lepers and the truly poor,  
 Prisoners, pilgrims,  
 Men slandered on the sly  
 Men brought to poverty  
 Who take their mischief meekly,  
 For their humility  
 Penance and purgatory  
 And A PARDON WITH  
     PIERS,  
 And all holy hermits

But hermits that dwell  
 And in inns among brewers,

and country stalkers,  
 till they be amended.

it banneth it thus;  
 am old yet have I not seen  
 his seed begging their bread.  
 to preach anon  
 what the Bible meaneth;  
 be ye full certain,  
 they keep no law,  
 with whom they have to do,  
 beggars like themselves,  
 they break his bones,  
 for evermore after;  
 among such beggars,  
 that walk this world.

have no part in Pardon

that be helpless and needy,  
 that cannot work,  
 the halt and lame,  
 quiet under Gods sending,  
 and men fallen on evil days,  
 and robbed men,  
 and their goods lost,  
 by fire or flood,  
 and mildly at heart,  
 our Lord hath granted  
 here on earth,  
 PARDON AND FORGIVE-  
     NESS,  
 shall have the same.

by the roadside,  
 that beg in churches,

Seeking all that holy hermits  
 Such as riches, reverence,  
 (These lollers and latchlifters  
 Now, naturally, by Christ,  
 For by English of elders  
 He that lolleth is lame,  
 Is maimed in some member,  
 Even so truly  
 Loll against the Creed  
 Where see ye them on Sundays  
 As at mattins in the morning  
 Or labouring for their living  
 But at midday mealtime  
 Coming in a cope,  
 And for the cloth upon him  
 He washeth and wipeth  
 When he worked in this world  
 He sat at the side-bench  
 No wine came then his way  
 Nor blanket on his bed  
 The cause of all this caitiffry  
 Who suffer such sloth

“ Piers,” quoth a priest then,  
 “ I will construe each clause  
 for thee

Piers at his prayer  
 And I stood behind them  
 both  
 All in two lines it lay,  
 They that have done good shall go to life eternal  
 But they that have done evil to everlasting fire  
 “ In sooth,” says the priest  
 then,  
 “ Only—‘ Do well and fare  
 well—

hate and despise,  
 and rich mens alms,  
 covet it all)  
 be such called lollers,  
 and old mens teaching  
 his leg out of joint,  
 it meaneth some mischief;  
 such manner of hermits  
 and the Law of Holy Church.  
 the service to hear,  
 till mass begin?  
 as the law would?  
 I meet with them oft,  
 as if they clergy were,  
 he is called Friar;  
 and sitteth with the best.  
 and won his meat honestly,  
 and at the second table;  
 through the long week,  
 nor white bread before him.  
 cometh from many bishops  
 and other sins to reign.

“ thy Pardon I must read,  
 and teach it thee in English.”

unfolded his Pardon,  
 and beheld all the bull,  
 not a letter more.  
 they that have done evil to everlasting fire  
 “ I can see no Pardon here,  
 and—God shall save thy soul—

—‘ Do evil and fare  
evil—

to hell shalt thou wend—

—‘ Hope for nought  
else—

after thy death day.’ ”—

And Piers for pure anger

pulled the Pardon in two

And, says he,

If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear  
no evil for Thou art with me.

“ I shall cease my sowing,” quoth Piers, “ and work not so hard,

“ And I shall not be so busy

about by belly and its joys,

“ I will weep, not sleep,

though I eat no wheaten bread,

“ The prophet ate his bread

in penance and in sorrow,

“ And many another

as the psalter saith,

“ That loveth God loyally

his living is simple.

My tears have been my meat day and night.

“ And Luke teacheth us

by the fowls of the air,

“ Not to be too busy

about the worlds bliss,

“ And sheweth us by example

how to teach ourselves;

“ The fowls in the field,

who finds them meat in winter?

“ No garner to go to have they,

God findeth for them all.”

“ What,” quoth the priest,

“ thou art learned then.

“ Who taught thee, Perkyn,

to read thy book? ”

“ Abbess Abstinence,” says

“ thou art learned then.

Piers,

“ taught me a.b.c.,

“ Conscience followed,

and taught me much more.”

“ Wert thou only a priest,

thou mightest preach anywhere,

Piers,

and for thy text

“ Doctor of Divinity

“ thou mightest preach anywhere,

The fool bath said.

and for thy text

“ Ignorant loon,” says Piers,

“ little lookest thou on thy

“ Seldom hast thou beheld

Bible,

Cast out the scorner and his

King Solomons saws ”

scorning with him.

The priest and Piers  
 I through their words awoke,  
 And saw the sun in the south  
 Meatless and moneyless,  
 I mused upon this dream,

Many a time hath this dream  
 For love of PIERS PLOW-  
 MAN

And for his Pardon,  
 And how the priest reviled it with  
 But I have no care of dreams;  
 Cato and Church lawyers  
**Care not for dreams.**

Yet the Bible, the Book,  
 How Daniel divined  
 To Nebuchadnezzar,  
 And Daniel said, "Sir king,  
 "Strange knights shall come  
 "And among humbler lords  
 "And as he divined  
 "The king lost his lordship,

"Ay, and Joseph dreamed  
 "And the eleven stars  
 "Then Jacob judged him:  
 "In famine we all

So befel it  
 Joseph was justice  
 As his father had said,  
 All this maketh me think  
 Many a time at midnight  
 I think on PIERS THE  
 PLOWMAN

And how the priest attacked it  
 But I deem that Do-well

jangled of the Pardon,  
 and waited about,  
 sinking at even.  
 on Malvern Hills,  
 and went upon my way.

made me to study,  
 pensive in my heart,  
 for the comfort of all people,  
 "The fool hath said—"  
 oft I see them fail,  
 bid us to leave them.

it beareth witness,  
 for a king his dream,  
 so named by the learned;  
 the dream is this;  
 and cleave thy kingdom,  
 thy land be parted;"  
 it fell out indeed  
 and humbler men took it.

—the sun and moon  
 bowed all to him,—  
 'Beau fils,' quoth he,  
 shall seek thee in our need.' "

in Pharaohs time,  
 and governed Egypt,  
 his friends sought Joseph.  
 somewhat of dreams,  
 when men should sleep,

and the Pardon that he had,  
 and reasoned it away,  
 had need of no indulgence,

Nor of pardon for two years,      pardon for three years,  
Or Bishops letters.

Do-well at Doomsday is worthily received  
And doth without any pardon      of S. Peters church,  
The pope hath no power      to grant a pardon,  
For men without penance      to pass to Paradise,  
This is a leaf out of my creed      as learned men teach me.

Whatever thou shalt bind on earth . . .  
And so I believe with fealty,  
That pardon and penance  
Souls that have sinned  
But for your three-years  
pardon,

It is not so certain for a soul

God forbid otherwise,  
and prayer *do* save  
seven times and deadly;

truly, methinks,  
as Do-well is.

Therefore, I counsel you,  
Who trust for your treasure

ye rich upon this earth,  
to have your three-years  
pardons,  
to break the Ten Command-  
ments,  
ye mayors and judges,

Be ye not bold enough

and be holden wise,  
and papal bulls,  
when the dead shall rise,  
to give account,  
how did we keep the laws,  
*this* the judgment will rehearse.  
of all the Orders Five,  
Pardons and Absolutions,  
unless Do-well can help you,  
will be worth—a piecrust.

And specially, ye masters,  
Ye that have the worlds  
wealth,

When ye purchase pardon,  
At the dreadful Doomsday,  
And all come before Christ  
How did we lead our lives,  
How did we day by day,  
Though ye be a Brother  
Though ye have a pocket full,  
And Doublefold Indulgences,  
Your patents and your pardons

Therefore I counsel Christian  
souls,  
And Mary his mother  
That God give us grace,

Cry God mercy  
to be our go-between  
ere we go hence,

Such works to work, while we be here,  
That after our death day Do-well may say  
At the day of doom, we did as he taught.  
Amen.

Here endeth Williams Vision of Piers Plowman.

*(A brief abstract follows of the books not fully transcribed.)*

THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL,  
DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST



# THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

## DO-WELL

THUS robed in russet  
All a summer season  
And oft I asked  
Where Do-well was  
Never wight as I went  
Till on a Friday  
For they be men  
Through countries, courts,  
Princes palaces,  
And know Do-well—and Do-evil.

“ Among us,” quoth they,  
“ And ever hath been

“ Nay,” said I, “ man sins  
“ Therefore he is not alway  
“ He is elsewhere now and then

“ My son,” said the Friar,  
“ How the good man sinneth

“ Set a man in a boat  
“ The wind and the water  
“ Make him stumble, if he  
    stand  
“ Through steering the boat  
“ Yet is he safe and sound

I roamed about,  
Do-well to seek,  
the folk I met  
and what man he might be.  
could tell me where,  
two Friars I saw;  
that walk most widely  
and many kinds of places,  
and poor mens cots,

“ that man is dwelling  
and ever shall be.”

seven times a day,  
among you Friars,  
and teacheth the people.”

“ I shall soon show thee  
seven times a day.

on a broad water;  
and boat wagging  
never so stiffly;  
he bendeth and boweth,  
so is it with the righteous;

“ Though he fall he falleth not, —he is in the boat—

“ And he is safe and sound.

“ Thus is it with men;

“ Goods are the great waves,

“ The boat is our body;

“ And thro the fiend and the

flesh

“ The just man sinneth

the water is the world,  
wallowing about,

and the frail world  
seven times a day.

“ But deadly sin he doth not,

“ He strengtheneth man to  
stand

“ And though thy body bow

“ Yet is thy soul safe.”

Do-well him guardeth,

and steereth his soul,  
as boat doth in the water,

“ Nay I cannot understand

all your wise words,

“ But if I live and look about  
me

I shall go learn better.”

“ Christ keep thee,” quoth he;  
“ And give you grace

and I said, “ Christ keep you  
good men to be.”

Thus I went wide-where,  
In a wide wilderness,  
Bliss of the birds song  
And on a lawn under a linden  
To listen to their lays,  
The mirth of their mouths  
And mid that bliss

walking alone,  
by a wood side.  
made me abide there,  
I leaned awhile  
their lovely notes;  
made me to sleep,  
I dreamed—marvellously.

Thought came and gave me over to Wit to tell me where dwelt Do-well. And Wit told me, “ In a castle near, watched by Sense, and the Castles name is Flesh;” and Wit spoke much to me on the foolishness of man. But Wits wife came, named Study, lean of body, and wondrous wroth with him.

Quoth she,

“ Wise art thou, Wit,

“ To fools or flatterers

wisdom to tell  
or frantic folk.”

She blamed him, she banned  
him,  
" Cast not your pearls to hogs;  
" Wisdom and Wit now  
" Save when carded with  
covetise  
" Whoso can contrive deceit,  
" Lead a merry meeting  
" His counsel is called for."

It was so in Jobs time, it is so to-day, said she. They that preach the truth are little cared for. You find men arguing of Christ, arguing of the Trinity, drivelling about the Deity when their belly is full.

" But the careful cry  
" Hungry, thirsty,  
" None calls him nearer  
" They shoo him off as a  
hound  
" God is not in that house

" The learned talk of God,  
" But the poor have Him in their heart.

" God is deaf now-a-days  
" And prayers have no power  
" Yet the wretches of this  
world  
" Nor for dread of death  
" Nor share their plenty with the poor;  
" But in gaiety, in gluttony  
" And the more they win,  
" And lord it over lands

" Hast thou much, spend  
generously;

she bad him be still,  
they have their haws.  
are not worth a cress

as clothiers comb their wool;  
conspire to wrong,  
and Truth beguile,

and call at their gates,  
chilly quaking,  
his woes to amend,  
and bid him go,  
nor His help neither.

and His name is on their lips

and deigneth not hear us,  
the Plague to stay,  
take no heed of it,  
withdraw them from pride,  
they glut themselves with  
wealth,  
wealth and riches,  
the less they part with.

so says the Book,

“ Whoso hath little spend as he may.

“ We have no warrant of our

lives

“ These lessons lords

“ And not to fare

“ From one feast to another

“ And hate abiding at home;

“ Miserable is the hall

“ Now have the rich a rule

“ In a private parlour

“ Because of the poor in the hall.”

how long they be,  
should love to hear,  
like fiddlers or Friars  
at other mens houses

where lord and lady will not  
sit;

to eat by themselves,  
or in a chamber with a chimney

Thus Study railed at her husband and at me.

And when Wit was ware  
He was dumb as death  
And smiled and louted  
In sign I should

what the dame said,  
and drew him back,  
and looked at Study,  
her grace beseech.

“ Mercy,” said I, “ madame,  
“ To work your will  
“ Tell me what is Do-well.”

your man I am,  
while my life lasteth.

“ For thy meekness, man,  
“ I will send thee to my  
cousins

and thy mild speech,  
Clergy and Scripture.

“ Give Clergy this sign;  
“ And greet his wife Scripture,  
“ Logic I taught her,  
“ Grammar for boys  
“ And would they learn not  
“ I made tools  
“ For carpenters, carvers,  
“ Taught them level and line,  
“ But Theology wearied me  
“ The more I muse thereon

I set him to school  
I taught her all,  
music I taught her,  
I bad men write,  
I beat them with a broom;  
for every craft,  
and the compass for masons;  
though now I look blind.  
ten score times,  
the mistier it seemeth.”

Then I thanked her and went on my way to Learning (Clergy) and got his words. He told me Do-well was to believe the articles of the faith; but his talk was long.

“ This is a long lesson,” quoth I,  
 “ Ye show me but darkly  
 “ Many tales ye tell me,  
 “ That I was made man  
 “ In the Legend of Life  
 “ Or else un-entered in the  
 Book

“ and little am I the wiser,  
 where Do-well or Do-better is;  
 taught by Theology,  
 and my name entered  
 long ere I was born,  
 for some wickedness of mine.”

But, I said, I find the unexpected in heaven and the builders of holy church in danger of being lost, as were the carpenters of Noahs ark who never got inside.

“ On Good Friday I find  
 “ That all his life had lived  
 “ Yet for he repented him  
 “ He was sooner saved  
 “ Or than Adam or Isaiah  
 “ That had lain with Lucifer  
 “ A robber was ransomed  
 “ Without purgatory penance

a felon was saved,  
 with lying and with theft;  
 and shrove him to Christ  
 than S. John the Baptist  
 or any of the Prophets  
 many long years;  
 rather than they  
 to perpetual bliss.

“ Then, Mary Magdalen,  
 “ Who worse than David  
 “ Or Paul the Apostle  
 “ The doughtiest doctor  
 “ Said thus in a sermon,  
**Lo, very idiots seize heaven,**  
 hell.

“ None sooner ravished  
 “ Than cunning clerks  
 “ None sooner saved,  
 “ Than plowmen, shepherds,  
 “ Cobblers and labourers,  
 “ Pierce with a prayer

what woman lived worse?  
 that Uriah destroyed,  
 that had no pity;  
 Augustine the old  
 I saw it once,

and we wise are plunged in

from the right creed  
 that con most books,  
 none surer in creed,  
 and poor common people,  
 land-tilling folk,  
 the palace of heaven.

“ Ye men know clerks that curse the day,  
“ That ever they learnt more than this,  
I believe in God the Father.

Then Scripture scorned me and gave reasons,  
And blamed me—in Latin and set light by me,  
And I wept for woe and wrath at her speech  
And in a winking I was brought away.

I met then with Fortune and, with her, two damsels, Lust of the Eyes and Lust of the Flesh and Recklessness, who praised poverty to me;

“ Although it be sore to suffer  
“ As without a walnut  
“ And after that,  
“ Is a kernel of comfort;  
“ It maketh man have mind  
    on God  
“ And safer he sleepeth,  
“ And dreadeth death less,  
“ Than the right rich man  
I am poor and play and thou  
    there cometh sweet after,  
    is a bitter bark,  
    the shell being gone,  
    so is it with poverty.  
  
and his mercy crave,  
the man that is poor,  
or the thief in the dark,  
—reason beareth witness  
art rich and art heavy.

“ Lo, lo, lords, lo,  
“ Not so long doth it last,  
“ As peascods and pears,  
“ Worldly wealth is a wicked  
    thing  
and ladies, take heed,  
your liquor sweet,  
as cherries and plums,  
to them that keep it.”

He went on to speak to me of Abraham and Job—both poor men once; and told me of the merchant and the messenger. No one stayeth the messenger upon his message (even though he go through the standing corn), for it is urgent and he is but poor; but the merchant is stayed and pays money on his goods and is in fear of robbery to boot;

" Ye wit well, ye wise,  
" The merchants are the rich. what this meaneth,  
to Christ accountable,

“ They must hold the high way  
 “ And have pity and help men  
 “ Tithe their goods truly  
 Bear ye one anothers burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Then after Recklessness had spoken, Nature came near and complained that all animals excepting man follow Reason, and I saw it was so;

I bowed my body,  
 Saw sun and sea,  
 Where birds and beasts  
 Wild serpents in the woods  
 Flecked with many a coloured feather;  
 Man and his mate,  
 Poverty and plenty,  
 And I saw all beasts  
 In eating and drinking  
 Man and his mate  
 Birds I beheld  
 I wondered from whom  
 To lay the sticks  
 Hiding and covering  
 In marshes on moors  
 Divers dived.  
 “ Where gat these wild things wit? ”  
 But that which most moved me  
 Was that I saw all beasts  
 Save man and mankind;  
 “ Wherefore,” said I,  
 “ Dost thou not rule  
 “ None surfeit as he does  
 “ In meat and in drink,  
 “ They overdo it day and night  
 But Reason reasoned me;  
 “ Why I suffer or suffer not.  
 “ Who suffereth more than  
 God? ”

and the ten Commandments  
 out of their riches,  
 and Christ is their toll-taker; ”

beholding all about me,  
 and the sand of the shore,  
 with their mates wandered,  
 and wonderful birds,  
 Peace and War,  
 bliss and bitter bale;  
 following Reason,  
 and gendering their kind;  
 alone were Reason-less.  
 making nests in the bushes,  
 and where the pie learnt  
 that lie in her nest,  
 that no fool should find;  
 in mire and in water  
 “ Dear God,” said I,

changing my mood,  
 following Reason,  
 “ so widely thou reignest  
 man and his mate?  
 and keep not measure,  
 in dress and in women,  
 and only they—none other.”  
 “ Reck thou never  
 “ No man, by my life,

“ He might amend in a minute all that is amiss,  
 “ But He suffereth to show us that we should all suffer.”

Then I saw one near me called Imagination. He rebuked me for my ignorance and for my presumption in that I thought I knew how God ruled the world of man and bird and beast. Nature understandeth more than man. Man knoweth little; no, he knoweth not why Adam ate the apple, nor why the homely lark is sweeter than the rich peacock, nor whether Saracens shall come to heaven, where the pagan Trajan is. “ Hadst thou held thy tongue,” said he, “ thou hadst been wise.”

And therewith I awaked  
 And forth gan walk  
 And my dreams I pondered.  
 Fortune had failed me  
 Age had threatened me

all but witless,  
 in mendicant wise,

Friars had shown me  
 And no corpse in their kirkyard  
 If he had not bequeathed them  
 And Nature had told me  
 And Imagination had spoken and vanished.

And I lay down and slept again.

Then came Conscience to comfort me,  
 And bad me come to his court  
 There saw I a master,  
 That louted low to Scripture,  
 They washed and wiped  
 But Patience in the palace  
 stood  
 And prayed for meat for  
 charity,  
 Like to PIERS PLOWMAN.

with Learning to dine.  
 his name I knew not,  
 and Conscience knew him,  
 and went to dinner,

in pilgrims clothes,

as he a palmer were,

The master was made sit as one that was most worthy

And Learning and Conscience  
Patience and I  
At a side-table.

They served us with simple food; but the master and his man on the high dais would eat nothing but the daintiest food, the sins of men.

Patience was proud  
And made mirth at his meat  
For the doctor on the dais  
He ate sundry meats,  
Wild boar and tripe,  
Then said I to myself,  
“ ‘Tis not four days since,  
“ This fellow preached  
“ Why, this Gods glutton  
“ Hath no pity on us poor;  
“ What he preacheth he liveth  
    not;”

That the dishes and the plates  
And Mahomet the devil with them.

But I sat still as Patience  
    bad

Rubbed his cheeks  
“ What is Do-well, Sir Doctor,

“ Do-well,” quoth the doctor,

“ Do thy neighbour no harm,

“ By this day, Sir Doctor,  
“ Ye have harmed us two,  
“ Mince and other meat,  
“ I would change my penance with yours.”

“ Now, Learning,” said Con-  
    science,

and Patience—came after.  
were put to be mates

of that proper service,  
but I mourned ever,  
drank wine so fast;  
minces and puddings,  
and eggs in grease fried,  
and Patience heard it,  
before the Dean of S. Pauls,  
of the penance of Paul;  
with his great cheeks  
evil he performeth,

and I wished well  
were molten in his maw

and soon the doctor  
as ruddy as a rose;  
does Do-better do penance? ”

—and took the cup and  
    drank—  
nor thyself neither.”

ye do not well,  
ye ate the pudding,  
no morsel had we,

“ tell us what is Do-well.”

“ I have seven sons,” said he,  
 “ Where liveth the lord of Life  
 “ Till I see those seven  
 “ For one PIERS PLOWMAN  
 “ And set all sciences at naught  
 “ And no text he taketh  
 “ But these two,  
 Love God and thy neighbour.  
 Lord who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, etc.  
 “ And saith that Do-well and  
 Do-better  
 “ And they imperfects, with  
 faith,  
 “ And he shall save mens souls,

“ serving in a castle,  
 to teach them Do-well,  
 have me excused,  
 hath impugned us all,  
 save only Love,  
 to maintain his cause  
 are two imperfect things,  
 find out Do-best,  
 saith PIERS PLOWMAN.”

Conscience then with Patience  
 went,  
 And Patience in his pocket  
 Sobriety and simple-speech  
 To care for him and Conscience,  
 Where are Unkindness and  
 Covetise,

pilgrims as it were,  
 took victuals pilgrim-wise,  
 and true-belief,  
 if they came anywhere  
 two hungry countries,

As we went on talking we met a minstrel and we asked him of his craft. He was, he said, a waferer and his name Active Life. “ I am hater of idleness,” says he, “ I am no singer or fiddler, jester or dancer. From Michaelmas to Michaelmas I sell my wafers: all London knows me.

“ They grumble when my cakes  
 “ With baked bread from  
 Stratford.  
 “ When the commons were full  
 of care  
 “ In the date of our drought  
 “ One thousand three hundred  
 “ My cakes were scarce

come not to town,  
 ’Tis not long since  
 and workmen were aghast,  
 in a dry April,  
 twice thirty and ten  
 when Chichester was mayor.”

I looked at him. His coat was Christian, it is true; but full

of spots; a spot of pride, a spot of rough speech, of scorn, of careless bearing, boasting and bragging; he belonged to an order of hermits and he the only person in the order; he was religious without rule and blamed all men. "By Christ, Hankyn," said Conscience, "thy coat must be washed." "Ay," said he, "it has many stains."

And Hankyn asked and Patience told him of Poverty and of Riches, and of the nine blessings of Poverty; and Poverty avoideth the Seven Deadly Sins. "It is," said Patience, "a hateful blessing, it judges none (for it is too poor to be made a judge); it is wealth without calumny; it is the gift of God; it is mother of health; it is a road of peace; it is a well of wisdom; it is business without loss; and it is happiness without care."

When Hankyn heard this he wept and wailed and with that I waked.

## DO-BETTER

But after my waking  
Ere I could know Do-well;  
And some blamed my life  
And set me for a lazy wretch  
Lords or ladies,  
Or persons in fine fur  
I never onced said  
And never louted low  
Till Reason had ruth on me

it was wondrous long  
and all my wits waned,  
and few allowed it,  
that would not reverence  
or any others lives,  
with pendants of silver;  
“God save you, lords,”  
and men held me a fool,  
and rocked me to sleep.

Then I met with Free Will and he told me of Charity, the beautiful story of Charity.

“Charity,” quoth I,  
“I have lived in London  
“I have lived in land,  
“Yet never found I Charity  
“Never saw I a man,  
“But would ask for his own,  
“Things that he needed not  
“Clerks tell me that Christ  
“But never saw I Him truly  
Now darkly, then face to face.

“He is proud of a penny  
“As glad of a gown  
“As of a Tartar tunic  
“Glad with the glad,  
“Sorry when he seeth men sorry  
“When one sweareth 'tis true  
“He weeneth no man  
“Nor any guile or grieve his fellow.  
“All sickness and sorrow  
“And all manner mischief

“Where may that be found?  
many long years,  
my name is Long Will,  
before or behind,  
so God help me,  
and other times covet  
and take them if he could.  
is in all places,  
save in a mirror,”

as of a pound of gold,  
made of grey russet,  
or of dyed scarlet;  
good to all wicked,  
even as children are.  
for truth he trusteth it,  
would swear and lie  
he taketh as solace,  
as ministry from heaven;

" Of death and of dearth  
 " Nor wept though he lost  
 " That never paid penny  
 " Hath he rents or riches  
 " Of rents and of riches  
 " A friend he hath that finds  
 him  
 " **Thy will be done**  
 " He can write Paternoster  
 " And often his wont is  
 " Where lie poor men and  
 prisoners  
 " Tho he bear them no bread  
 " He loveth them  
 " And when he is weary  
 " Labour in a laundry  
 " Run back to his youth  
 " To his pride and its purte-  
 nance  
 " And wash it clean  
 " And then singeth he at the  
 washing  
**An bumble and a contrite heart Lord thou wilt not despise.**  
 " By Christ I would I knew  
 him  
 " Without help of PIERS  
 PLOWMAN  
 " Do not clerks know him  
 " Clerks have no knowledge  
 " But PIERS THE PLOW-  
 MAN  
**God seeth their thoughts.**

adread he was never,  
 or lent to the man  
 in the place when he borrowed."  
 or any rich friends?"  
 recketh he never,  
 and fails him never.  
 feeds him evermore.  
 and paint it with Aves,  
 to wend in pilgrimage,  
 his pardon to have.  
 his help is sweeter,  
 and looketh how they fare.  
 then will he often  
 for half an hour,  
 and roundly will speak  
 and pack it together,  
 with his eyes warm water,  
 and often weepeth  
**Lord thou wilt not despise.**  
 no creature sooner."  
 thou seest him never."  
 that keep holy church?"  
 but by works and by words  
 perceiveth far deeper.

" For there be proud-hearted  
 men  
 " And sweet in their bearing  
 " But to the poor  
 " And look as a lion  
 " And there are beggars  
 " Looking like lambs  
 " But all to have their meat  
 " Not for penance or perfect-  
 ness  
 " Therefore not by colour,  
 " Nor by words nor by works  
 " But by PIERS PLOWMAN

" I have seen him in silk  
 " In grey and in fur  
 " And gladly he gave it  
 " Edmund and Edward  
 " Each was a saint  
 " I have seen him singing  
 " But in rich robes  
 " With cap and oiled hair  
 " And cleanly clothed  
 " In a Friars frock  
 " In Saint Francis time

patient of tongue,  
 to lords and to burgesses,  
 they have pepper in the nose,  
 when men blame their deeds.  
 bidders and bedesmen,  
 and seeming life-holy,  
 with such an easy face;

do they follow poverty.  
 no nor by learning,  
 shalt thou know Charity,  
 and that is CHRIST.

I have seen him in russet,  
 and in gilt armour,  
 to men that it needed,  
 each was a king,  
 and theirs too was Charity.  
 in ragged weeds,  
 often he walketh  
 and his crown shaven,  
 in black and Tartar silk.  
 once was he found  
 —but it is long ago."

Then Free Will told me of the lives of the hermits, the lives of the Saints and of the bringing of heathen England to Christ; of the life of Mahomet and of the days of Constantine when lands and rents and lordships were first showered upon the church, and when from heaven came the angels voice condemning the gifts to the churches;

This gift to-day  
 And those that have S. Peters  
 power

hath poison drunk  
 are poisoned all.

And he went on to tell of Christs miracles and how Saracens may yet be saved.

Pharisees and Saracens,  
 Are folk of one faith  
 And since they know  
**I believe in God the Father Almighty**  
 Prelates of provinces  
 Little by little  
**And in Jesus Christ His Son**  
 Till they could speak and spell the third,  
**And in the Holy Ghost,**  
 And say it and set it down with  
 the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the  
 life everlasting.

Then I met with PIERS PLOWMAN and he showed me the tree of Charity and the three props of it to keep it from the World, the Flesh, and the Devil: and he went on to tell me the story of the Cross.

And I awaked therewith  
 And after PIERS PLOWMAN  
 Eastward and westward  
 And went forth as a fool  
 After PIERS PLOWMAN.

and wiped mine eyes,  
 I looked and stared,  
 I watched well,  
 in the lands to espy

And anon I saw Abraham with Lazarus and he told me his story; and I met the Good Samaritan going to a tournament at Jerusalem and heard of his help to the man upon the Jericho Road when Hope and Faith fled away and would not help. And he talked with me; but at the last,

“I may no longer stay,” said  
 He, and pricked his grey steed  
 And went away like the wind.

*(Here follows the Harrowing of Hell fully transcribed.)*

## THE VISION OF THE TRIUMPH OF PIERS PLOWMAN AND OF THE HARROWING OF HELL

WOE-WEARY, wetshod,  
Like a reckless man  
Like a beggar went I,  
Till I waxed weary of this  
world

I rested me till Lent came,  
I dreamed of maidens singing

And old folk sang Hosanna to the organs.

One like the Good Samaritan, and somewhat like PIERS  
PLOWMAN,  
Came barefoot, bootless,  
Riding on an asses back,  
Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,  
To get him his gilt spurs

without spur or spear,  
brightly he looked,  
and his slashed shoes.

Faith sat in a window high, cried "Hosanna, Son of  
David,"  
As a herald crieth when the  
adventurous  
And Jews sang for joy.  
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Then I asked Faith  
And who should fight the  
tourney  
"Jesus," says he, "and he  
shall fetch  
"PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT."

what might this to-do all mean,  
in Jerusalem.  
what the Fiend claimeth

“ Is Piers then in this place? ” said I, and Faith stared upon me:  
 “ This Jesus of his nobility for love hath undertaken,  
 “ Not to be known as Perfect but in Piers Plowmans arms  
 God to joust,

“ His helmet and his breast-  
 plate  
 “ In Piers plate-armour  
 “ No dinting blow shall harm him.”

“ And who shall joust with  
 Jesus?

“ Nay, but the Fiend,  
 “ Death saith he will bring down and spoil  
 “ All that liveth and lurketh,  
 “ Life saith he lieth,  
 “ That for all that Death can  
 do

“ Jesus from the Fiend shall  
 fetch  
 “ And put them where he will  
 “ And beat and burn for ever-  
 more

Death, I will be the death of thee.

Then came Pilate and much  
 people  
 To see how doughtily Death  
 should do

The Jews and justices  
 And all the court cried loud  
 on him

Then stood out a robber  
 “ This Jesus jested at our  
 temple,

—the nature of mankind.

this armed knight shall ride,

Shall the scribes? the Jews? ”

False Judgment, Death.

on land or sea.  
 and hath laid his life on it,

in three days time

PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT,  
 and bind King Lucifer,

all bale and death.”

and sat upon the judgment-  
 seat,  
 and to judge betwixt them  
 twain.

were against Jesus,

“ Crucify.”

before Pilate and said:

he would destroy it in a day,

“ And build it in three days  
again,  
“ Build it as long and large,  
“ As broad as e'er it was.

“ Crucify him,” cries a catch-  
pole,  
“ Away, away,” says another,  
And began to make a garland  
And set it sore upon his head.  
“ Ave, Rabbi,” quoth the  
ribald,  
And nailed him with nails  
And set poison on a pole  
And bid him drink his death draught;  
“ And if thou subtle be,  
“ If thou be Christ,  
“ Come adown from this rood,  
“ We will believe Life loveth  
thee

“ It is finished,” quoth Christ,  
Piteous and pale

The Lord of life and light  
The day for dread withdrew,  
The temple-wall wagged and  
clave  
The hard rock was riven,  
The earth shook and quaked,  
And from their deep graves came the dead,  
And told why that tempest

“ Life and Death in this  
darkness  
“ And none shall know in very  
truth

here he stands that said it,  
as high and deep,  
We all can witness it.”

“ I warrant he is a witch,”  
and took keen thorns  
out of a green tree,  
and shot reeds in his eyes,  
all naked on the rood,  
and put it to his lips  
help now thyself;  
Gods son of Heaven,  
we will believe thee then,  
and will not let thee die.”

and began to swoon,  
as a prisoner that dieth.  
laid his eyes together.

and dark became the sun,  
and all the world quivered,  
right dark night it seemed,  
as though life it had,  
for so long time endured.

are fighting one the other,  
who shall have the mastery,

“ Till Sunday about dawn.”  
 Some said he was Gods son  
 Some said, “ He knoweth  
 sorcery,  
 “ Ere he be taken down

Two thieves suffered on the  
 cross  
 Quickly came a catchpole  
 And their arms after  
 But nobody was so bold  
 For he was Knight and Kings  
 son  
 That none should be so hardy

But then came forth a blind  
 knight  
 Longeus was his name,  
 And before Pilate and the rest  
 And whether he would or no  
 All they that waited  
 To touch him or to handle him

But this blind Bachelor  
 The blood sprang down his  
 spear  
 Then fell he on his knees  
 “ Against my will it was,” says  
 he,  
 He sighed and said:  
 “ The deed that I have done;  
 “ My lands, my body,  
 “ And have mercy on me,  
 righteous Jesu,”

Then gan Faith foully  
 And called them cursed caitiffs:

With that they sank to earth,  
 that had so beautifully died;  
 and well is it to try  
 if he be dead or no.’

beside him at that time,  
 and cracked their legs a-two,  
 of either of these thieves,  
 to touch Gods body,

—Nature would have it thus,  
 to lay a hand upon him.

with keen-ground spear,  
 his sight had he long lost,  
 he stood and waited,  
 they made him strike at Jesus.  
 were not bold enough  
 or take him down and grave  
 him;  
 thrust him through the heart.

and opened the knights eyes.  
 and cried, “ Jesu, mercy,

“ I wounded thee so sore.”  
 “ Sorely it troubleth me  
 I put me in thy hands,  
 take all at thy will,  
 and with that he wept.

the false Jews to despise,  
 “ This was vile villainy,

"Vengeance on you all,  
 "One that is dead;  
 "Cursed caitiffs,  
 "With any bright weapon  
 "Yet for all his grievous  
     wounds  
 "For your champion chevalier,  
 "Yields himself vanquished  
     in the tilt,  
 "And when this darkness is  
     past by  
 "And ye lordings have lost  
     the day  
 "Your freedom shall be thral-  
     dom;  
 "Them shall ye never  
 "But ye shall be barren men,  
 "The life which our Lord God  
 "Now are your good days  
     done,  
 "When Christ overcame  
 When the Holy of Holies  
     cease.

All for fear of this  
 I moved me in that darkness

Then saw I walking from the  
     west  
 Mercy her name, mild and kind,  
 Her sister comely and clean  
 Truth was her name and strong  
 And when these maidens met,  
 Each asked the other  
 Of the darkness and the din  
 And of the light and gleam

that made blind man beat  
     'tis a boys deed.  
 it was never knighthood,  
     to strike a body bound;  
  
 hath Jesus won the prize,  
 chief knight of you all,  
  
 and is at Jesus will.  
  
 Death will be vanquished,  
  
 for Life shall have the mastery,  
  
 your children shall be churls,  
 make lords of land to till it,  
 ye shall live by usury,  
 in all your laws forbade.  
  
 as David told of you,  
     your kingdom should depart."  
 When the Holy of Holies  
     cometh your anointing shall

and of the false Jews  
 towards Hell where He had  
     gone.

a maiden looking hell-ward,  
 a maiden lovely in speech,  
 softly walking from the east,  
 is the power that went with her.  
 Mercy and Truth,  
 of the great wonder,  
 and of the dawning light,  
 which lay before Hell gate.

“ I marvel at this,” said Truth,  
 “ Marvel not,” saith Mercy,  
 “ A maid named Mary,  
 “ Conceived and was with  
 child  
 “ And without childbirth taint  
 “ And since this child was born  
 “ He died and suffered  
 “ That is the cause of this  
 eclipse

“ Meaning that man shall be  
 “ While this light and gleam  
 thou seest

“ Patriarchs and prophets  
 “ The thing that through a tree  
 was lost  
 “ And that which death brought  
 down to hell

“ That thou tellest,” says  
 Truth,  
 “ For Adam, Eve and Abraham,  
 “ All that lie in pain,

“ Or have them out of hell?  
 “ It is but trifling talk;  
 “ The thing that once was in  
 hell  
 “ Job, the perfect patriarch,  
 In hell is no redemption.

“ Through what I have learnt,” says Mercy, “ I hope they shall  
 be saved;  
 “ Venom cureth venom,  
 “ And Adam and Eve  
 “ Of all biting venoms

“ and go to know its meaning.”  
 “ it meaneth mirth.  
 mother immaculate,

through the Holy Ghost,  
 into this world brought him,  
 have thirty winters gone;  
 this day about noon;

that closeth now the sunlight,  
 drawn from the murk of hell

shall blind Lucifer.”

have preached it oft,  
 shall by a tree be won,  
 death shall relieve.”

“ is but a tale of Walterot;  
 patriarchs and prophets,  
 shall yon light bring them  
 aloft

Hold thy tongue, Mercy,  
 I, Truth, know it,

out of it cometh never,  
 reproveth thy saying:

for that I have proof,  
 shall have remedy.  
 the vilest is the scorpions;

“ No medicine may amend  
 “ Till he be dead and put upon the spot;  
 “ The first poison,  
 “ So shall this Death destroy,  
 “ All that Death did first  
 “ And even as thro’ guile  
 “ So shall Grace that began all  
 things  
 “ And beguile Guile  
 Art shall deceive art.

“ Stay,” said Truth,  
 “ From out the nipping north,  
 “ Righteousness running;  
 “ He knoweth more than we,  
 “ That is Truth,” quoth Mercy,  
 “ Peace comes playing  
 “ Love hath long coveted her;  
 “ He hath sent her some letter  
 “ That thus hangeth over Hell,

When Peace in patience clad  
 Righteousness saluted her  
 And prayed Peace tell  
 In her gay garments

“ My will is to wend,” says she,  
 “ Adam and Eve  
 “ Moses and many more  
 “ And I shall dance and thou,  
 “ For Jesus jousted well  
 At morning time there shall be joy.

“ Love, my dear one,  
 “ That my sister Mercy and I  
 “ And that God hath forgiven

the place where he stingeth,  
 through power of himself,  
 I dare lay my life,  
 thro’ the devils enticements;  
 man was beguiled,  
 make a good end,  
 and that is good cunning.”

“ I see, methinketh,  
 not far from hence,  
 rest we a while,  
 of old he was before us.”

“ and I see from the south  
 and in patience clothed.  
 nay, I believe,  
 to say what this light meaneth,  
 and she shall tell us all.”

approached the two,  
 in her rich clothing,  
 to what place she wended  
 and whom she thought to  
 greet.

“ and welcome them all,  
 and many more in hell,  
 shall sing the Song of Mary,  
 sister, shalt dance to it,  
 and joy beginneth to dawn.

such letters sent me,  
 mankind should save,  
 and granted to all mankind,

“ That Mercy and I  
“ Christ hath changed  
“ To fear and pity,

shall go bail for all.  
the nature of righteousness  
of his pure grace.”

“ Lo here the patent and the  
token  
In peace I shall sleep and take rest.  
“ Ravest thou,” saith Right-  
eousness,  
“ Believest thou yon light  
“ And save mans soul?

that the deed shall endure.”

“ or art thou right drunk?  
may unlock hell,  
Sister, believe it never.

“ At the beginning  
“ Adam and Eve,  
“ Should die downright  
“ If they touched the tree  
“ And Adam afterwards,  
“ Ate of the fruit  
“ The loyal love of our Lord  
“ And followed the teaching of  
the Fiend  
“ Against reason I, Righteous-  
ness,  
“ Their pain is perpetual,  
“ Let them chew as they chose  
“ It is a bootless bale,

God gave the doom himself  
and their issue all,  
and dwell in pain eternal,  
and of its fruit did eat,  
against the warning,  
and, as it were, forsook  
and his teaching,

and the will of his flesh.

remember this in truth;  
no prayers may them help,  
and let us not chide,  
the bit which they once ate.”

“ And I shall pray,” says  
Peace,  
“ Their woe change into weal.  
“ Had they known no woe  
“ No wight knoweth weal  
“ No man knoweth hunger  
“ Who could by nature  
“ If all the world were swan-  
white;  
“ Who could tell clearly

“ their pain may have an end

they had not known their weal.  
that never suffered woe;  
that never felt want;  
tell me what colour is,

and if no night were  
what means the day?

“ Had God never suffered  
 “ Never had He clearly known  
 “ So God that made all  
 “ And suffered himself  
 “ Death that unknitteth every  
     care  
 “ For till famine come on us  
 “ Therefore God of his goodness  
 “ In solace and in sovran mirth,  
 “ And then suffered him to sin, to feel sorrow,  
 “ To know what weal was.  
 “ And afterwards adventured,  
 “ To know what Adam suffered  
 “ In heaven, in earth,  
 “ To know what all woe is  
 “ So shall it fare with this  
     folk;  
 “ Shall teach them what love is  
 “ For no wight knoweth what  
     war is  
 “ Nor what is ‘ well ’

at other hands than his  
 if death were sour or sweet.  
 became man of a maiden,  
 to see death-sorrow;  
 and is the beginning of rest;  
 none knoweth what is enough.  
 set the first man Adam  
 and took Adams nature  
 in three sundry places,  
 and now he goeth into hell,  
 —God that knew all joy.  
 their folly and their sin  
 and endless joy;  
 when peace reigneth,  
 till ‘ well-a-day ’ teach him.”

There was one there  
 Father Book was his name  
 “ By Gods body,” says this  
     Book,  
 “ When this child was born  
 “ That all the wise of this  
     world  
 “ That in Bethlehem city  
 “ To save mans soul  
 “ And all the elements  
 “ The welkin first showed  
 “ Those that were in heaven  
 “ And lighted it as a torch  
 “ That light followed the Lord

with two broad eyes,  
 a bold man of speech;  
 “ I will bear witness  
 there blazed a star,  
 in one word agreed  
 a child was born  
 and sin destroy.  
 bare witness unto that.  
 that he was God Almighty,  
 took a star-comet,  
 to reverence his birth,  
 to the earth below.

“ The water witnessed he was

God,

“ Peter the apostle

“ And as he went upon the  
water

Lord, bid me come to Thee upon the waters.

“ Lo, how the sun gan lock

“ When she saw him suffer  
death

“ Lo, the earth for sorrow

“ Quaked like a quick thing

“ Hell could not hold,

“ And let out Simeons sons

The shall not see death . . .

“ Now shall Lucifer believe it

“ For Jesus, like a giant,

“ To beat and break down

“ And to have out all he will.

“ I, Father Book, will be  
burnt,

“ And comfort all his kinsmen

“ And disjoin and destroy

“ And save they reverence his  
resurrection

“ And on a new law believe

“ Stay we,” said Truth,

“ Speaking to hell.”

Lift up your gates.

And in the Light a voice

“ Ye Princes of this palace,

“ Here cometh unto his crown

Then sighed Satan and said:

“ Such a light against our will

for he walked on it.

perceived his going,

knew him well and said,

her light up in herself

who made the sun and sea.  
that he should suffer death  
and cracked the rocks in pieces.  
it opened when God suffered,  
to see him hang upon the  
Rood.

tho loth he be,  
cometh yonder with an engine  
all that be against him

if Jesus rise not unto life,  
and bring them out of care,  
the joy of all the Jews,

and honour the Rood  
they shall be lost life and soul.”  
“ I hear and see a spirit

cried loud to Lucifer;  
unpin, unlock the gates;  
the King of all glory.”

Lazarus once fetched,

“ Cold care and trouble  
 “ If this king come in to us  
 “ And lead them all where  
     Lazarus is  
 “ Patriarchs and prophets  
 “ That such a lord and such a  
     light

“ Rise up, Ragamuffin,  
 “ That Belial thy grandfather  
 “ And I shall stay this lord  
 “ Ere through brightness we be  
     blinded,  
 “ Check him and chain all up,  
 “ That no light may leap in,  
 “ Ashtaroth, cry thou loud,  
 “ Colting and all his kin,  
 “ Cast upon their heads  
 “ Brimstone burning, boiling.  
 “ Set bows with levers,  
 “ Shoot out shot enough  
 “ Set Mahomet at the catapults  
 “ With crooks and calthrops

“ Listen,” quoth Lucifer,  
 “ Both this lord and this light  
 “ No death can harm him,  
 “ And where he will he takes  
     his way  
 “ If he rob me of my right  
 “ For by right and reason  
 “ Be mine body and soul  
 “ For he himself hath said,  
 “ Adam and Eve and all their  
     sons  
 “ If that they touched the tree  
 “ Thus this Lord of Light allowed.

is come upon us all.  
 mankind he will fetch too  
 and lightly will he bind me.  
 have spoken of this thing  
 shall lead them all hence.  
 and bring us all the bars  
 and thy dam hammered out,  
 and stop his light,  
 bar we our gates.  
 and each chink stop,  
 at loover or at loophole;  
 and have out all our knaves,  
 and save all we own;  
 who come anigh the walls  
 and brazen guns,  
 their squadrons to blind;  
 and hurl millstones on them,  
 harass them all.”

“ I know this lord well,  
 long time I have known them,  
 nor no devils craft,  
 but beware him of the peril.  
 he robbeth me by strength,  
 the men that be in hell  
 good and evil;  
 who is the father of hell,  
 should die and dwell with us  
     for ever,  
 or took an apple of the fruit,

“ And, since he be so true a lord,

“ We have been possessed of them

“ Never was word against it said,

“ He were a traitor to his word

“ That is true,” saith Satan,

“ For we gat these men with guile,

“ Against his love, against his leave

“ Not in fiendly fashion

“ And sat up in the apple-tree,

“ And we promised her and him

“ As the gods do, as God himself,

With treason and with treachery

“ And made them break obedience

“ Thus gat we them as ours

“ Yet where guile is at the root

“ And God will not be guiled,”

“ We have no true title to them;

“ Therefore I dread me,

“ As thou didst cheat Gods image

“ So hath he cheated us

“ Thirty winters hath he come

I ween he will not rob us;

seven thousand winters;

and if he now began

—and he, the Witness of Truth.”

“ but I sore doubt me

and we his garden entered

and went upon his land,

but in a serpents form,  
and egged Eve to eat.

that after they should know

both good and ill,

we deceived them both,

through our false behest;  
and brought them hither at the last;

what is gotten is ill gotten.”

says Goblin, “ nor be tricked;  
though our treasures they

were judged,

lest Truth will fetch them.

in going like a snake,  
in coming like a Man.

in a mans likeness,

“ And gone about and  
preached,”  
“ I have assailed him with sin;  
“ Short answer made he me.  
“ And when I saw that it was  
so,  
“ What kind of man he was  
“ I would have lengthened his  
life;  
“ And his soul came hitherward  
“ This body, while it went alive,  
“ To teach men to be true  
“ The which life and custom  
“ He will undo us devils

“ And now I see his soul,  
“ With glory and great light;  
“ I counsel that we flee,  
“ It were better not to be  
“ Through thy lies, O Lucifer,  
“ And out of heaven hither  
“ We believed in thy lies,  
“ And now, for thy last lying,  
“ We have lost our lordship  
Now shall the prince of this world be cast forth.

*(The writer speaks)*

As Satan rebuked Lucifer  
I believe our Lord  
And requite them the wretched-  
ness  
Be ye ware, ye wise clerks,  
Ye deceive not the simple;  
What is the liars end;  
Thou shalt destroy all that speak lying.  
A little have I overleapt,  
And have not said what I saw

says the fiend Goblin.  
I have asked if he be God,

I warned Pilates wife,  
for the Jews hated him.

I knew that if he died  
he would despoil us all.  
ever it went about  
and each to love the other,  
he usèd long.  
and bring us all down.

sailing hitherwards,  
'tis God, I know well;  
flee fast all of us,  
than abide in his sight.  
we first lost our joy,  
thy pride made us to fall;  
and thus we lost our bliss,  
we have lost Adam,  
on water and in hell."

then for his lying  
will rebuke liars here,

that on earth is wrought.  
ye witty men of law,  
David witnesseth

because of lying,  
and followed my story.

## (The narrative proceeds)

When Light bad unlock the gates,

“ What lord art thou? ” says

Lucifer,

“ The Lord of Might and Main,

“ Thou duke of this dim place,

“ That Christ may enter in

and a voice said aloud,  
that made all things,  
anon undo thy gates,  
the Kings Son of heaven.”

With that word hell brake  
For aught that any wight could

do,

Wide the gates opened.

The people that sat in darkness

**Behold, the Lamb of God.**

Lucifer could not look up,  
And those whom our Lord had

loved

“ Lo, I am here,” saith He,

“ For all sinful souls,

and all Belials bars,

or porter of the gate.

Patriarchs and prophets  
sang with S. John

“ Mine were they; of me they  
came;

“ Although reason may re-  
member,

“ That, if they ate the apple,

“ I declared for them no hell for

“ The deadly sin they did

“ With guile thou gainedst  
them,

“ For in my palace Paradise,

“ Falsely thou fetchedst thence

“ Thou like a lizard with a ladys face

“ Trappedst them, beguiledst  
them,

“ Against my love, against my leave;

“ The old law teacheth

the light so blinded him,

with that light departed forth;  
“ life and soul both  
to save the rights of them and  
me;

I may the better claim them;

and my own right too,  
all should die,  
ever.

by thy deceit was done;

against all reason,  
in form of an adder,  
things that I loved.

breaking my garden through,  
beguilers are beguiled,

“ And in their cunning fall;  
 “ And whoso hitteth out mans  
 eye

the same pain shall he have.

**E**ye for eye, tooth for tooth.

“ So life shall be lost  
 “ Life for a life,  
 “ Soul for a soul,  
 “ Adam and his issue

when life hath taken life.  
 the old Law asketh so,  
 and by that Law I claim it,  
 at my will for evermore.

“ I, that am lord of life,  
 “ And, for that drink to-day, I died.

love is my drink,

“ I will drink of no ditch,  
 “ But from the Common Cups  
 “ But thy drink is death,  
 “ I fought so for mans sake

of no deep knowledge,  
 —all Christian souls—  
 and deep hell thy bowl.  
 that yet,

**3** thirst.

“ No nectar and no cyder  
 “ Shall moisten me,  
 “ Until the vintage fall  
 “ And I drink ripe wine,  
 “ Then shall I as king

and no costly drink  
 or slake my thirst,  
 in the valley of Josaphat,  
 the resurrection of the dead.  
 come with angels and with

“ And have out of Hell

crowns,  
 all mens souls.

“ Fiends and fiendlings  
 “ And at my bidding be  
 “ But I am merciful to men,  
 “ For men and I be blood  
 brethren,

before me shall stand,  
 for bliss or pain.  
 my nature asketh it,  
 though not all brothers in  
 baptism;

“ All that be wholly brothers  
 of mine  
 “ Shall not be damned  
**Against thee only have 3 sinned.**

in baptism and blood  
 to the death everlasting.

“ It is not mens wont  
 “ And if the king of the kingdom come  
 “ When a thief should suffer

to hang a felon more than once;  
 death or punishment

“ Law willeth that the king  
give life  
“ I that am king of kings  
“ Where the death-doom  
“ And if Law will I look on them  
“ Whether they die or do not die  
“ And if their sins be bold  
“ Though Holy Writ will I be  
avenged

**No evil deed unpunished, etcetera.**

“ They shall be cleansed clearly  
“ In my prison purgatory  
“ For blood may see blood  
“ But blood may not see blood  
bleed

“ But my righteousness and my  
“ And mercy and mankind

“ I were an unkind king  
“ At such a time of need.

**Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord.**

“ Thus, by right of Law,  
“ All that loved me  
“ But, for the lie, Lucifer,  
“ Thou shalt abide it bitterly ”  
with chains.

Astrot and all others  
They durst not look upon our  
Lord

But let him lead forth what he  
list

And many hundred angels

**The flesh sinneth, the flesh redeemeth, the flesh reigneth,  
God of God.**

Then piped Peace

“ After sharpest showers,

if the felon look on him,  
shall come at such a time  
condemneth ll the wicked,  
it lieth in my grace,  
did they never so ill;  
I may do mercy,

on them that did ill.

and washed from all their sins,  
till pardon suffer it.  
a-hungered and a-cold,

without ruth and pity.

right shall reign in Hell,  
shall stand before me in  
heaven;

if I helped not my kin

I lead away hence  
and believed in my coming;  
that thou didst lie to Eve,  
(quoth God), and bound him

hid themselves in darkness,

the least of them all,

and leave therewhom he would,  
harped and sang;

a note of poetry and sang;  
most shining is the sun;

" There is no warmer weather than after watery clouds,  
 " Nor is love sweeter, nor are friends dearer,  
 " Than after war and wrack when Love and Peace have  
     gotten the victory.  
 " War never was in this world, nor wicked envy,  
 " Which Love if he would could not to laughter bring,  
 " And Peace through patience all perils end."  
 " A truce," quoth Truth, " thou tellest truth,  
 " Embrace we in covenant of it; each of us kiss the other;"  
 " And let no people," quoth " see that we chide  
     Peace, to him that is almighty."  
 " For nothing is impossible  
 " Thou sayest sooth," says Righteousness, and kissed Peace reverently  
 And Peace kissed her world without end.  
 Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and  
     peace have kissed each other.  
 Truth then trumpeted and sang;  
 We praise Thee, O God.  
 And Love luted in a loud note;  
 See how good and joyful a thing it is . . .  
 Till the day dawned these damsels danced,  
 And men rang in the resurrection morning.  
 With that I woke and called to Kitty my wife  
 And to Kalot my daughter and said:  
 " Arise, do reverence to Gods resurrection,  
 " Creep on your knees to the and kiss it for a jewel,  
     cross none richer on the earth,  
 " And the most righteous relic, it bare Gods blessed body,  
 " For for our redemption it frighteneth every fiend,  
 " And so great is its power no grisly ghost may glide."  
 " That where its shadow falls

*(An abstract of the concluding books follows.)*

## DO-BEST

Thus I waked and wrote  
And dight me ready  
To hear the mass  
In midst of the mass  
I fell soon asleep  
That PIERS THE PLOW-  
MAN

And came in with a cross  
Like in all his limbs  
And then I called Conscience  
" Is this Jesus the Jouster  
" Or is it PIERS PLOWMAN ;  
And Conscience kneeled,  
" His colours, his coat-armour,  
" It is Christ with his Cross

all I had dreamed,  
and went me to church,  
and be housled after.  
when men went to offering,  
and suddenly—a dream,

was painted all bloody  
before the common people,  
to our Lord Jesu,  
to tell me the truth ;  
that the Jews did to death,  
who painted him so red ? ”  
“ These be Piers arms,  
but He that cometh so bloody  
conqueror of Christendom.”

Then Conscience told me of Christs resurrection and how He gave his power to PIERS PLOWMAN, and anon departed into heaven and sent the Holy Ghost to Piers and to his fellows and gave them many gifts, the four gospels and the four fathers, Austin, Ambrose, Gregory and Jerome, and four seeds ; and Piers sowed them all, cardinal virtues, Prudence and Temperance and Justice and Bravery.

Then came Pride and gathered his host together against Piers and against Grace and against Conscience and all Christians, and sent out Spill-love mounted on his horse Speak-ill-behind. And Piers and his people gathered to Fort Unity and dug a trench about it, and Conscience called Piers army to the sacrament.

“ Come,” cries Conscience,  
“ Ye that laboured loyally  
“ Here is bread blessed

“ Christians and dine  
all this Lent time  
and Gods body there-under.”

“ How,” quoth the common  
men,

“ All that we owe

“ and must we needs pay  
ere we go to housling? ”

“ That is my counsel,

“ Then be forgiven,

each forgive other,  
and then—the altar.”

“ Yea, baw,” cries a brewer,

“ By fear, for all your jangling

“ Nor follow Conscience

“ Dregs and draff

“ Thick ale and thin ale,

“ Not to toil after holiness.”

“ I will not be ruled  
with your spirit of justice,  
while I can sell  
and draw it at one tap  
that is my trade

“ I am a curate of the church,”

“ Never man told me

“ I never knew Cardinal

“ And we parsons pay for them,

“ And the robbers that ride with them.

cries a fool vicar,  
of cardinal virtues,  
that came not from the Pope,  
their furs and their palfreys,

“ Therefore,” says this vicar,

“ No Cardinal should come

“ Let them and their holiness

“ With the Jews at Avignon.”

~~With the holy thou shalt be holy.~~

“ Or in Rome as their rule bids

“ by very God, I would  
among the common people,  
hold them still

“ And thou Conscience, thy  
place

is in the Kings courts

“ And Grace that thou pratest  
of

should guide all clerks

“ And Piers with his new  
plough

“ Should be Emperor of all the  
world

“ Imperfect is the Pope

and eke with his old

and make it all Christian,  
that should all people help,

“ And sendeth men to slay  
 “ And God bless Piers Plow-  
 man  
 “ As well for wastrels  
 “ As for his servants and him-  
 self  
 “ And travaileth and tilleth  
 “ As for a true tidy man  
 “ As for the commons  
 “ The counsel of Conscience

Then out laughed a lord,  
 “ I hold it right and reason  
 “ All that my auditors  
 “ Counsel me by their books  
 “ With the spirit of under-  
 standing  
 “ With the spirit of bravery

Then there came a king  
 “ I am king  
 “ And holy church and learning  
 “ And if me lacketh aught  
 “ Where soonest I find it.  
 “ And what I take of you  
 “ Of the spirit of justice,  
 “ I may be safely housled

“ In condition,” quoth Con-  
 science  
 “ And rule thy realm in reason  
 “ Then shalt thou have thine asking.”  
**All is thine to defend, but not thine to rob.**  
 The vicars home was far off  
 And I awaked

those he should save,  
 who tilleth for all,  
 and wenches in the brothel  
 though he serves himself first,  
 as hard for a traitor  
 all times alike.  
 they heed but little  
 and his cardinal virtues.”

“ By this light,” says he,  
 to take of my steward  
 or else my agents  
 and by my clerks accounts  
 they made the account roll,  
 willy nilly I take it.”

and, “ By my crown,” he said,  
 the commons to rule,  
 from the cursed to defend,  
 Law wills that I take it  
 I am above the Law.  
 I take it at the teaching  
 for I judge you all,  
 for I never borrow.”

“ that thou canst defend  
 right well and in truth  
 and he bowed and took leave  
 and wrote my dream.

Then for the last time I went upon my way and I met Need.  
 He reviled me for meekly listening when the lord and the king

had spoken so boldly. "Couldst thou not excuse thyself?" says he. "The king steals, the lord steals; and thy need, thy necessity may well steal too. Need hath no Law."

He sinneth not  
 And if he seeth a cloth  
 Need anon taketh it  
 And if he list to drink  
 He should drink at *any* ditch  
 So Need at greed need  
 Without counsel of Conscience  
 Save the spirit of temperance.  
 Wise men forsook wealth  
 And dwelt in deserts  
 And God all his great joy  
 And came and took mankind  
 in him  
 Both fox and fowl  
 Fishes have fins  
 Need hath taken hold on me  
 And suffer sorrows sour.  
 Be not abashed  
 Since He that wrought all the  
 world  
 Never a one so needy

that winneth his food thus,  
 and can make no better bargain  
 and keepeth it for surety.  
 the law of nature would  
 ere he for thirst died;  
 may take as for his own  
 or any cardinal virtues  
  
 for they would be needy,  
 and would not be rich,  
 spiritually left  
  
 and became needy;  
 may flee to holes and creep,  
 to fleet therewith to rest,  
 and I must needs stay  
  
 to beg and to be needy,  
  
 was willingly needy,  
 nor none died so poor.

### THE VISION OF ANTICHRIST

WHEN Need left me  
 And dreamed marvellously  
 Antichrist came,  
 Turned upside down  
 And made the false spring and  
 spread  
 In every country where he  
 came  
 And made guile grow there

anon I fell asleep  
 that in mans form  
 and all the crop of truth  
 and overset the root  
  
 increasing mens needs.  
  
 he cut truth away,  
 as though he were God.

Friars followed that fiend  
 Convents reverenced him  
 And all the house came forth  
 To welcome his, to welcome  
 him,  
 And they would rather die than  
 live

Antichrist had thus soon  
 Pride bare it boldly

“I counsel you,” says Con-  
 cience,  
 “Into the Fort of Unity  
 “Cry we to Nature  
 “From the hurts of the fiend  
 “Cry we to all the commons  
 “And there abide and fight

Nature heard Conscience  
 And sent forth his foragers,  
 Coughs and heart-catches  
 Rheums and red eyes  
 Boils and botches  
 Frenzies and foul ills  
 Pricked and preyed  
 That a legion lost their lives.  
 “Harrow and help,” they cried,  
 “With dreadful Death  
 The lecherous lord  
 To a knight called Comfort  
 “To arms,” cried Comfort,  
 Then met the battle  
 Or heralds of arms

Old Age hoary  
 Bare the banner before Death,

for he gave them copes,  
 and rang their bells,  
 to welcome the tyrant  
 save fools alone,  
 since loyalty was blamed.

hundreds at his banner,  
 and a lecherous lord.

“ come with me, ye fools,  
 and hold we us there,  
 to come and defend us  
 for love of PIERS PLOW-  
 MAN.  
 to come into Unity  
 against Belials children.”

and from the planets came,  
 fevers and fluxes,  
 cramps and toothaches,  
 and running scabs,  
 and burning ague,  
 the foragers of Nature,  
 on peoples heads

“ here cometh Nature  
 to undo us all.”  
 then cried aloud  
 to bear his banner.  
 “ each keep his own life.”  
 ere minstrels could pipe  
 had named the knights.

went in the vanward,  
 by right he claimed it;

Nature came after  
 Pocks and pestilence,  
 Death drove down after him  
 Kings and Knights,  
 Learned and foolish,  
 Whom he hit straight  
 Many a lovely lady,  
 Swooned and died

Conscience of his courtesy  
 To cease and suffer them  
 Leave Pride privily  
 And Nature ceased

Fortune gan flatter  
 Long life he promised them  
 Among all manner men  
 And gathered a great host  
 Lechery did his will  
 With privy speech  
 Armed him in idleness  
 A bow he bare in hand  
 Feathered with fair promise  
 And his untidy tales  
 Conscience and his company

Then came Covetise  
 Overcome Conscience  
 Armed him in avarice  
 His weapons all wiles  
 And with glosing and with  
     gabbing  
 Simony sent him  
 To hold with Antichrist  
 And bid them come  
 Made Good Faith flee  
 And boldly brought down

with many keen sores,  
 and slew much people;  
 and pashed all to dust,  
 Kaisers and Popes,  
 let no man stand,  
 never stirred after;  
 many a knights leman  
 for sorrow of Deaths dints.

Nature besought  
 and see if they would  
 and be perfect Christian;  
 to see the people mend.

the few that lived,  
 and sent out Lechery  
 unwedded and wedded,  
 all against Conscience.  
 with a laughing face,  
 and painted word,  
 and in high looks,  
 and many broad arrows,  
 and many a false truth,  
 troubled full oft  
 of holy church the teachers.

casting how he might  
 and the cardinal virtues,  
 and lived hungerly,  
 to win and to hide,

he guiled the people.  
 to preach to the prelates  
 and save their stipends  
 to Court to Conscience  
 and Falsehood stay,  
 with many a bright bribe

The wit and wisdom  
Rode at a judge  
And overset his truth  
Then to the Court of Arches  
And with a miniver mantle  
Matrimony went his way  
And devised divorce.

“A,” cried Conscience,

“So keen a fighter

Then laughed Life  
And armed him in haste  
Held Holiness for a jest

And Loyalty a churl  
Conscience and Counsel

Thus Life boasted  
And pricked forth with Pride  
Cared not how many Nature  
slew  
And kill all earthly creatures

Life leapt aside

“Health and I,” cried he,  
“Shall keep thee from dread  
“We will forget sorrow

This pleased Life  
And they glорied and begat  
One that wrought much woe,  
And Sloth waxed wondrously  
And wedded Wanhope  
Her sire was a juryman  
One Tommy Two-tongues

of Westminster Hall;  
and tilted at his ear  
with “Take-this-and-help-us;”  
and turned Law to Simony,  
bribed its officers,  
ere death departed them

“would Covetise were Chris-  
tian,  
so bold and biding.”

and slashed his clothes,  
in ribald words,  
and Kindness for a spend-  
thrift,  
and Liar a gentleman,  
he counted it folly.

when things seemed better,  
and praised no virtue,

who at the last shall come  
save Conscience alone.

and caught a leman to him,  
“and an high heart  
of Death or Eld,  
and care naught for sin.”

and Fortune his leman,  
a gadding at last,  
—Sloth was his name—  
and soon was of age,  
a wench from a brothel;  
that never swore true,  
tainted in every court,

Then Sloth spied war  
 And threw dread of despair  
 And Conscience cried on Eld  
 Bad him fight for the right

Then Eld took heart  
 And waved away Wanhope  
 And Life fled away  
 Besought him succour  
 Gave gold, good measure  
 The doctors gave him  
 Life believed that leechcraft  
 And with drinks and drugs

Sloth with his sling  
 Proud priests came with him  
 With cloaks and pointed shoes  
 They came on Conscience,  
 "By Mary," quoth a cursed  
 priest  
 "I count Conscience not a whit  
 "No not so much as

So said sixty  
 And shot their shots against us,  
 Broad-hooked arrows

And almost brought down Holiness and Unity.

Then came the Friars to help Conscience; but they knew not how to fight. Yet Need pleaded for them and at last Conscience smiled and took them in to the Castle of Unity.

"Keep you in Unity,  
 "Learned or simple  
 "I will be your surety  
 "If ye leave Logic

and made a sling ready  
 twelve mile around him,  
 and frighten Despair.

and was hastily shriven  
 and fought with Life,  
 to Physic for help,  
 and used his salves,  
 that gladdened his heart  
 a glass house to live in.  
 should stay the steps of Eld  
 drive away Death.

an hard assault he made,  
 more than a thousand,  
 and long blades dangling;  
 they fought for Covetise,  
 (was of the Irish border),  
 if so be I get silver,  
 a draught of good ale."

of the same country,  
 many a sheaf of oaths,  
 "By-Gods-heart, by-Gods-  
 nails,"

and envy none,  
 but live by your rule  
 for your bread and for your  
 clothes  
 and learn instead to Love."

Conscience held him  
And made Peace porter  
All tale tellers  
Hypocrisy and envy  
Conscience called a leech  
Salve those that sick be  
Shrift shaped sharp salve  
" Pay that thou owest."

Some liked not this leech  
" Was any surgeon in the fort  
Love-to-live-in-Lechery  
He had fasted on a Friday  
" One Friar Flattery," says he,

" We have no need," says Con-  
science,  
" Parson or parish priest,  
" Than one PIERS PLOW-  
MAN  
" Yet will I suffer  
" Friar Flattery be fetched

Friar Flattery heard of it,  
To a lord for a letter  
As though he were curate,  
Boldly to the bishop  
Came there where Conscience  
was  
Peace unpinned it,  
And in haste asked him

" Ifaith," quoth this Friar,  
" For his profit and health,  
" He is sick," quoth Peace,  
" Hypocrisy hath hurt them,

in holy church Unity,  
to pin the gates;  
and idle titterers,  
an hard assault made;  
that well could shrive,  
and by sin wounded;  
and made men do penance,

and sent up letters  
with softer plasters?"  
lay there and groaned,  
and fared as he would die,  
" is surgeon and physician."

" I wot no better leech  
penitencer or bishop,  
that ruleth them all.  
since ye desire it  
to physic all you sick."

hied him fast  
to have leave to cure  
and came with his letters  
and gat his brief;

and knocked at the gate,  
porter of Fort Unity,  
what was his wish.

" I would talk with Contrition  
for this I came hither."

" and many another,  
hardly will they recover."

“But I am surgeon,  
“I pray thee then,” saith  
Peace,  
“Who art thou then?  
“Certes,” says he,  
“Yea, go thy gate,” says  
Peace,  
“I knew one like thee  
“Came in a cope  
“Was my lords leech  
“This preacher salved the  
women,  
“Till some were with child.”

Conscience knoweth me.”

“ere thou pass in,  
Hide not thy name.”

“I am, Sir Enter-houses.”

“ thou comest not herein,  
eight winter gone,  
at a court where I dwelt,  
and leech to my lady,

When the lord was away,

But Kind-speech bid Peace

“Let in the Friar;  
“Life by his teaching  
“And dread Death  
“And be at one with Conscience.”

open the gates,  
he may here see  
leave all Covetise  
and withdraw from Pride

“Thou art welcome,” quoth

Conscience,  
“Here is Contrition  
“Comfort him  
“The parsons plaster  
“He left it on him overlong,

“canst heal the sick?  
my cousin wounded,  
and care for his sores  
biteth him deep,  
from one Lent to another.”

“I shall amend it,” said the Preacher,

And goes and grips Contrition  
Made of a private payment;

“I shall pray for you  
To another, “I shall make you  
“At mass and mattins, my  
lady,

and gave him a plaster  
and to one he says,  
and for all your friends,”  
Sister of an Order,  
for a little silver.”

Thus he goeth and gathered gold,  
and flattereth when he  
shriveth,

Till Contrition clean forgot to cry and weep,  
And lie awake for his wicked as once he was wont,  
deeds that is the sovran salve,  
And Contrition left contrition And took his comfort from the Friar.

Conscience cried aloud and bad Learning help him  
And called upon Contrition to help and keep the gate;  
Saith Peace, "He lieth and and so doth many another,  
dreameth this folk hath enchanted,  
"The Friar with his physic "And plastered them so  
"And plastered them so pleasantly they dread no sin."

"By Christ," quoth Conscience, "I will become a pilgrim  
"And walk as wide as the world lasteth  
"To seek—PIERS PLOWMAN."

(Here endeth PIERS PLOWMAN.)



## COMMENT



## COMMENT

Comfort the poor, protect and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. Then shall the Lord love thee and God Himself shall be thy great reward.—*Attributed to King Alfred.*

EVERY literature has its dreamers. It is so simple to sit down, fall asleep, and then assail your enemies and support yourself by dreaming your opinions. If any objection be taken, well, it was a dream. Plato dreamed his beautiful myths; the wonderful relation of Er at the close of the Republic was but the dream of one who had been dead; the moody tinker of Bedford dreamed the *Pilgrims Progress*; Roman literature has its *Somnium Scipionis*; Chaucer dreamed Scipios dream again in the *Parlement of Foules*; Dantes vision was but a vision when sleep came on him in the wood; the whole of the *Faerie Queene* may be said to be a dream. The dream is as common to poet and prose writer as is the invisible cap or the impossible task to the folk and fairy lorist.

It must be admitted at the outset that some dreams—whatever the machinery may be for their production—are artistic, finished, jointed, logical. We recall them in the morning; beyond their incongruity, their horror or their fun, we can find no fault with them. Indeed we are amazed at their cleverness. All is in order; every incident proceeds from what has gone before; they are admirably prepared; and good dreamers will certainly support and believe R. L. Stevensons statement that the dreaming brain can make excellent plots. The well-known essay on Dreams gives, apparently in good faith, an illustration of this, and Stevensons dream-plot, if unmarketable, is, at least, most striking.

But other dreams, literary or no, are as confused as the welter of waves on a rocky shore. You make out the general movements but no more. New waves are continually breaking from all sides; and it is to this order of dream that the vision of Pier, Plowman belongs. As I said in the Preface, the general scheme is clear; but the detailed pictures are inconsistent, detached, and in some instances apparently useless for the main purpose.

The writer is always falling asleep; half-way through the book he is dead and buried; the vision finishes and begins again; the end is no end; the Plowman himself is an elusive dream-figure with many shades of meaning in him; apparently, though it was twice revised, the work had no final revision. It is of a piece with its chaotic century. We should not be surprised to find that the book was based on a dream.

But the confusion of the dream is nothing to the confusion of the allegory. Even the sexes of the various figures seem indeterminate; and Wit, Wisdom, Clergy, Scripture, Imagination, the Active Man, Peace, Mercy, Reason, Righteousness, Repentance, must not be driven hard towards consistency. It will be well for the reader, if he wishes to get a clear picture of the dream, not to insist upon its details. That such a clear picture may be obtained I hope I have shown in my Preface; but few allegories may be pushed roughly to their conclusions. Even Professor Saintsbury, that eulogist of the *Faerie Queene*, is constrained to admit that you may if you like leave the allegory alone; it "won't hurt you."

The book definitely promises a picture of England between 1350 and 1400. The dates of course are not given, but these are supplied by the evidence of its contents. We are to see the Field full of Folk. We are not going to look on any Dutch interiors, or mere portraiture of a few saints and a few sinners; there are to be no "nine and twenty in a company of sundry folk by aventure ifalle;" something wider, bigger is promised us, nothing short of a birds-eye view of the English world with London for its centre, while the dreamers body lies on the Malvern Hills, and over him sing the birds of early summer, and the brook runs babbling by and mingles its sound with the noise of a great multitude. You shall see the Pope, titular head of Christendom, finding it hard as the King does to guide men as he would; cardinals against whose election you and I may not speak, for we are no Lollards, not we; bishops running freely through all sorts of offices and doing all kinds of work as William of Wykeham and Bishop Spencer of Norwich did; unable, for all their cleverness, to rule their dioceses and to keep the robber pardoner and the meddling friar away; priests, deacons and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers and doorkeepers, all the seven "minor orders" of the Church; you shall see abbots men of business, Priors men of management, and all the people under their rule; monks and professed brethren, clerks and

novices; you shall see the hard-working parish priest, passably ignorant, miserably poor and made poorer by his mortal enemy the friar; the friars, all the four orders, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Austins, pledged to poverty and pursuing wealth; the chantry priest and the gild priest each bent on making an income and filling a soft place; and with them the good and bad accompaniments of a great Church, hermits, anchorites, pilgrims and palmers. But there are more to be seen than these; and in the great plain are officials of every kind, sheriffs and bedels, assizers and jurymen, whose business it seems to be to prey upon humanity. Turn your eyes in another direction and Edward III. is slowly dying (alas for the Black Prince who might have done so much—he is gone) and Lady Meed is stripping off his ring; the kitten Richard II., so helpless at first, so foolish afterwards, is in the hands of Parliament or nobles; the nobles are quarrelling, the Commons are curbing them; disorder, disorganisation and attempted reform can all be seen from Malvern Hills. As for the lawyers, you shall see enough of them, all dressed in furs, all pleading for pence, all open to bribery, and juries and witnesses, judges and pleaders are on the look-out for florins. Then the merchants pass by and the moneylenders, the big and little traders, till we come to the very dregs and find ourselves face to face with the Seven Deadly Sins of London. London itself and its narrow ways, its bridges, its palaces, its convents, its hovels, its brothels, you shall see them all and almost catch the conversations as the people pass by us. You can be present at the great Stourbridge fair and there see Venetian glass, Bruges linen, Spanish iron, Norwegian tar, Hanse fur, Cornish tin and Cretan wine, all for sale in the half of a square mile which was occupied for three whole weeks. Then you shall come forth into the country and watch the misery of the country poor, hear of their work, their food, their dress; and so along the roads past the crowds of beggars and wastrels, till perhaps you shall get a dinner in some great man's house and take part, from a side-bench, in a discussion of some useless point of theology. Nothing shall escape you by the way, the burial-places of the Great Pestilence, the stocks, the pillory, the cucking-stool, the alehouse, the hospital, the prison, the recluse in his cell, the doctor murdering his patients, the minstrel telling his love stories, the juggler and the monkey-man, the farmer and his stots, the poor priest preaching, the lunatic loller prophesying, and the train of Lady Meed. Nay, you may, if

you be fortunate, see Piers himself, sowing his seed and preaching to the pilgrims of Truth, and may dream of him, as Jesus, leaving the world with Piers Plowmans fruit—poor humanity—in his arms, the only Saviour of the world. This world-wide “landscape with figures” is the promise of William Langland—a promise more than fulfilled, for not half the scenes have been enumerated, not a quarter of the characters named. Could any one to-day, in Langlands social position, dream, promise and perform so great an undertaking as this?

We take the story from the writers standpoint. It is not, as some histories tell us, that the kings wars were unimportant; but they were to the writer and to the people whom he represents the least important of his visions. No one in editing a peoples book to-day should begin with discussing the European position, or the change of an Indian capital; but the price of sugar, the picture palace, the emptiness of churches, the six-penny doctor, the schools, the football field, the public-house and the district nurse would attract the Langland of to-day first. By the Langland of to-day I mean Mr. Masterman, Miss Loane, Mr. Lysons, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Harold Begbie and Mr. Stephen Reynolds. I begin then with the book picture of the writer himself, always premising that in this work the writer set himself an enormous task, that his view may be one-sided and extreme, and that, even in his self-revelations, we may be on ground as treacherous as when we try to recover Charles Lamb from the hints of Elia.

“Long Will,” as he calls himself, in one memorable line, was set to school in early days and learned to love the school and cloister; for one who afterwards was so severe a critic of this world, he speaks kindly of these early days. It may have been at Malvern; and he may have gained then his vague and rather intellectual love of the country and its sights. But in this he never approached Chaucer, who is filled through and through with the outdoor Englishmans appreciation of field and forest and stream; for Langland was as much a town man as Dr. Johnson.

His learning is remarkable. The Bible is, if roughly quoted, at his fingers ends; but he never uses the Wycliffite version, though it must have been accessible in some form before the last recension of the manuscript. In this however he is not singular; for Wyclif never quotes from what is called his own translation. The usual reading of the Fathers supplies Langland

with a few texts and a few illustrations; Gregory, Jerome, Austin and of course Cato are among the writers he has heard most of; indeed to the medievalist Cato may be regarded as a Church Father. The apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus may have helped him in that tremendous section of his poem in which Piers Plowmans fruit, *i.e.* humanity, is brought from Hell; but it is unsafe to dogmatise, for so much was known by being heard and repeated orally that before Caxtons time a man might possess a very liberal education and yet have never seen a book at all; so much did the writer of that day rely upon his memory. A few French sentences prove little; Chaucer himself, who must have spoken French well, avoids French speech more than Shakespeare does; and there is no hint of Langlands knowing any Greek. It is interesting to think he may have read Chaucers Prologue; let us hope, for the sake of his own peace of mind, that he did not; for he would, I fear, have reckoned Chaucer among the minstrels.

He must have drifted to London for he knows it well: he certainly represents himself as preferring the easy life of a chantry priest to that of a hard-working man. Cornhill and S. Pauls are the most respectable parts of London mentioned by him; but the poorer or disreputable parts mentioned, such as Cocks Lane, Shoreditch, with their stews and their quacks, are many, and their characters are drawn to the life. He says he was married and had a daughter; but he is careful to give wife and daughter equivocal names, which he need not have done. He convicts himself of lax practice in regard to honesty in work. He is extremely careful to point out that whatever may be thought of his opinions in the poem, he is not a loller; indeed, he made verses on the lollers when he lived in Cornhill. He was always poor, always welcome, always critical; but in London his opinions developed and he became one with the mass which new ideas were slowly moving. He found himself the apostle of the poor, the honest quiet poor, whom he came to love passionately. Their poverty, grinding and unceasing, he ascribed to want of philanthropy, robbery, jobbery and bad government. He never ascribed it to simony at Avignon—the sinful city—nor to the French wars, as he might have done had he been writing to-day of his own work; nor, of course, did he understand that there may be a dozen causes for misery, some of the causes being directly attributable to the miserable themselves. He is not in the least ashamed of begging for the poor

or for himself; and indeed the magnificent philanthropy of the medieval Church in its best days had encouraged begging, and perhaps produced the poverty it strove to alleviate. In all centuries (at any rate in England) the condition of the poor has been watched over and alleviated by the rich and the moderately rich in a way that shows, gainsay it who may, that the teaching of Christ in regard to individual responsibility has up to now permeated the country; and though poverty may have overtaken benevolence, and though benevolence itself may be a mistake and philanthropy a crime, no friend of the poor would care to imagine an England denuded instantly of all that has been given and is being freely and gladly given to the poor from definitely religious and Christian sources. This is more true even of pre-Reformation than of post-Reformation England, for in Langlands day the state assumed no responsibility. It must be remembered that he wrote a quarter of a century after the Black Death and England had not in any sense recovered; and it must be further remembered that in his day the alleged enmities of class and class, sex and sex, capital and labour, had not been felt. The rich and the poor, notwithstanding the Peasants Revolt, were nearer one another than they are to-day. The enmities in Langlands day were those of king and nobles, nobles and the middle class; neither the king nor the rich merchant was in theory or practice unfriendly to the people.

Yet, whether he understood the problems or no, his book is more valuable than any contemporary writing: for he wrote from the inside. He tells us what the poor wanted; and only lately, notwithstanding the fact that his book and his teaching have been accessible for five hundred years, has this lesson been learnt. It is a new discovery to us, that the poor have opinions regarding their betterment. It comes almost as a shock to us to read in his pages that his poor required lower rents, better and less adulterated food, warm clothes, and above all the kindly sympathy of people who lived among them and tried to understand them. We can almost hear him saying to us: "Give us these first, and then, if you like, you can go on to model villages and sterilised milk." I respectfully wonder if Mr. Stephen Reynolds and Miss M. Loane, who write with knowledge of our poor, have carefully looked through *Piers Plowman*; if they have they must have been startled.

Besides loving the poor and hating the wastrel, Langland loved

the Church and hated its household enemies. It is true that (considering his century) a minimum of dogma satisfied him: but with this he combined a maximum of Christ. The Pope, as such, is a legitimate ruler; he seems to know nothing of the rottenness of Rome and Avignon; even the Church machinery was good; but it was worked ill. We who live in a time when the clergy (I use the word of the ministers of all denominations) work hard, are not over-dressed, do not carry forbidden revolvers, do not rob the poor, do not pay money out of the country, do not plead in papal courts, are not absentees or pluralists, and certainly are not rich, can hardly understand that a man of Langlands sympathies should have been, as he certainly was, so strong a defender of the fourteenth-century Church. In it he sees the only bulwark against Antichrist; and he cannot even see this bulwark raised unless the friars and monks and parish priests and bishops come with Piers Plowman into the Castle of Unity.

And if he loves the Church, he is at least respectful to the king. Beyond a sharp word now and again to Edward III. and a remonstrance to Richard II., Langland is a king's man; it seems to me that he even has some insight into the difficulties of both sovereigns when he writes that pathetic line:

“But it is hard,” quoth the king, “to guide my people to honesty.”

Even the great and rich he does not attack indiscriminately; and he certainly believed in those class distinctions which every society and every section of society makes, though it hides them as decently as it can and professes to abhor them.

But lawyers, theologians, most minstrels, physicians and unemployables he cannot away with; and here we see for the first time the narrowness of one who did not understand law or theology, and who could not fiddle or cure the sick. For there must have been, and indeed he allows it, many lawyers who were not bribable, many theologians who knew what they were talking about, some decent-mouthed minstrels and a few satisfactory doctors; but his lines about the unemployable might have been written in 1912.

Here then is the man; a reformer of Church and State and a defender of the poor; failing perhaps from the very immensity of his canvas to paint all his pictures equally well, yet contriving even in his bitterest moments to follow his own advice to the king, “Hear the other side.” Again and again he pleads against

his own writing, and you may seek in vain through all the book for one word of self-praise.

His humour is not Chaucers; his coarse passages may be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and they are then very brief and blunt; while Chaucer, like Shakespeare and all the Elizabethans, is crammed with passages which Langland would never have tolerated. He is too much in earnest to waste his time in loose talk; though, if he had wished to do so, the sardonic writer of the Seven Deadly Sins could have put to shame Skelton, Dryden and Wycherley in their own peculiar mistles. Fun there is, satire there is, in abundance; but there is no filth, nor, alas, except in one passage, are there any tears. He is dry-eyed, staring at Antichrist. England is hurrying to the precipice and Piers Plowman is gone.

His choice of metre, if metre it can be called, was no doubt intentional; he meant to get to the ears of the people and this he could only do by alliteration or by ballad. The Chaucerian line would have stamped him as a dilettante in social reform. The result is that the book is not a poem; no juggling will reduce it to rules; no whitewashing will make it all interesting; but it stands crammed with living pictures and full of a terrible anger. Whether he did gain the peoples ear is very doubtful; the one quotation in the trumpet-calls of the 1381 revolt is not at all conclusive; apart from ballad, song and folk-tale, literature has never been thoroughly assimilated by the English people; the people have no time to read. The Bible alone and a certain amount of economic prophecy have sunk deep.

I cannot understand why his book has never been seized on by artists and illustrators; and I venture to call the readers attention particularly to the following descriptions which are full of the power of a poet who carelessly let the poetry go—the ride to Westminster, the Vision of the Sins, the description of Piers service to Truth, the description of the cottager, the character of Charity, and the descent into Hell.

This then was the man and this the book which set out to describe fourteenth-century England: for whom was the book intended and why was it written? what were the real pictures as we have them from other sources? is Piers Plowmans indictment true?

Langland was born into a world the great fact of which was the Church. It was everywhere. It possessed nearly, not

quite, all the learning of his day; it filled offices which have long since been handed to the laity. Its courts controlled Church affairs and a good deal more than Church affairs—personal morality (save the mark) came largely under its lash and its fine. It was wealthy, national, proud at heart; as the Good Parliament showed, it hated Roman aggression; but it was waiting for a chance of burning heretics—which soon came. Its buildings filled the streets of London and Oxford; the parish church, the cathedral church, the friars convent, the monks abbey, the chantry, the anchorites cell, the *mesondieux*, and even the schools, all were—the Church. It was as impossible for a reformer to write a poem and not to fill it with the Church as it would seem absurd for a modern reformer to regard the Church as the centre of all. It is the custom to deride the fourteenth-century Church. Langland and Wyclif, so different in other matters, denounce the wholesale simony, the traffic in pardons, the whole institution of the friars, the power of foreign priests, the misused wealth of the Church and the misspent time of her sons; and Chaucer, who could not rise to these heights of indignation, never loses a chance of satire. Even the modern Catholic historian Lingard cannot point to the fourteenth century with satisfaction; and the French Jusserand admits fully the charges of the poets. It is well therefore to realise that if there is no other side to the question, in two respects at least the Church of the fourteenth century has had scanty justice done to it. And first of all, it was not blind to its own defects. The abuses noted in Chaucer and Langland are condemned strongly in a papal letter of the time. In 1340 the Bishop of Durham, in 1378 the Archbishop of Canterbury, pleaded for reform. "Nothing can give a better idea of the wickedness of Pardoners than the actual letters of Popes and Bishops" (Jusserand). Again, the Church was democratic in this, that by it and by it alone the poor man's son saw and took his chance. A long list of archbishops and bishops might easily be written out, all of whom came from the homes of the poor. It was no uncommon thing for a promising serf to receive freedom and to be trained in the service of Church and State; and it is precisely this carelessness as regards the birth or even the legitimacy of its clergy that draws down Langland's strong criticism: for Langland, apostle of the poor, believed in gentle birth. The knightly Chaucer, who had been about the world and fought, thinks nothing of the fact that his parson, the

gentlest, sweetest saint in all his writings, was own brother to a ploughman who had “ ilad of donge ful many a fother,” but Langland wishes that the Church would keep the poor in their places. The following paragraph quoted freely is worth consideration: “ The most striking feature of the centuries to the sixteenth is the way in which the Church opened up a career to all ranks and classes of the people. There was of course always a strong aristocratical element among the clergy . . . the middle classes supplied a great number of parish chaplains, assistant curates, chantry priests, gild priests; young men born and bred as serfs were not infrequently educated and ordained. Among archbishops only, Richard came from humble parents; E. Rich was son of a merchant, R. Kilwardby was a Dominican friar; W. Reynolds was son of a baker; Chichele was a shepherd boy picked up and educated by William of Wykeham; Cranmers people were small squires; R. Flambard, the great justiciar of Henry I., was the son of a poor Norman priest; Richard of Wych, the saintly bishop of Winchester, was son of a decayed farmer at Droitwich, and for several years worked as a labourer; the famous Grosseteste was of a poor family at Stradbrooke in Suffolk ” (Cutts, *Parish Priests*, 133). Sir Robert Sale, who died so heroically in 1381, fighting against the insurgents, was himself a serf who had risen to knighthood, and was captain-general of Norwich. Only through the theory and practice of the medieval Church did poor mens sons become lawyers, architects, sheriffs, scribes, physicians and teachers.

Chaucer understands the theory of the Church Catholic, a theory which has never changed, that all men before it are equal. In this Eastern and Western religions are alike. The practice of the Church has indeed varied; but the curious anomaly may be noted that the world has invariably taken a view which is at variance with that of the Church. The worlds practice is to treat men as equal, as far as it can, and not to hurt their feelings; that they are equal in any sense it never will believe.

In another matter the medieval Church demands the respect of its modern critic. It aided education; indeed, it was the only educator, and, directly by its teaching, indirectly by its encouragement of benevolence, it founded places of education which flourished till the Reformation. Writers as diverse as Mr. A. F. Leach, Mr. Bass Mullinger, Professor Thorold Rogers, relying on statutes, sermons, charters, and quoting freely from

contemporary authors, come to the same conclusion, that the pre-Reformation Church was the friend, not the enemy, of the education of the poor; for the rich man either derided all education or had his own peculiar way of obtaining it. If Church advice had been followed, the battle of and for modern education, especially primary education, would have been infinitely easier to fight. Richard II. rejected a proposal to forbid villeins to send their children to school to learn clergée (knowledge): “Every man or woman, of what state or condition he be, shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at any school that pleaseth them within the realm.”

The Church then, full of mistakes, crammed with internecine and often unpatriotic quarrels, but still in theory, and to a great extent in practice, the poor man’s Church, filled the picture. Its spiritual pretensions were high—its ecclesiastical pretensions were enormous—but its social pretensions were not those of some of the later centuries. The world will always yield (or has till now always yielded) to spiritual pretensions when adequately supported by the consistent life. It clings even now to the legend of S. Francis, whose spiritual pretensions, under the guise of humility, were an unconscious travesty of those of his master; even ecclesiastical pretensions it will listen to, though with a smile, when based on what it loves—sympathy, charity, humanity; but the social pretension which grew from wealth and from an ill-defined class feeling, it cannot reconcile with the teaching of the poor parson of the *Canterbury Tales*. Classes there must always be; man is not happy without them, and they exist in every station of society; but society knows at heart that they should be decently covered, and the truest mark of a “gentleman” is to hide his “gentlemanliness.” Castes there must always be; Piers Plowman himself belonged to the very highest, whether we look at him in his mittens or as riding to the gates of Hell; and of all the characters in the poem his spiritual pretensions are the greatest. Yet, by virtue of his freedom from social pretensions, he is intensely democratic.

The Church of any country, any century, can hope to recover lost ground among what are called the masses, not by a whittling down of dogma, nor by a renunciation of claims to denounce the sins of society—for the human society is the Church—but by a frank abjuration of all social and economic pretensions. The history of the friars, as well as that of the Salvation Army, point alike to the right road and to the parting of the ways.

The parish church was the special property of the people who lived round it. When small, it still had some gild window, some long-remembered connection with the great or small village names. It rose, as it often rises to-day, the only building of the human souls ambition, above the meaner roofs; it was the centre of village life and the meeting-place of the dead. When large, it served for examination room, playhouse, even dancing floor; it was open every day and all day; it had its daily services. It was the rallying-point of the English villages. Parsons might be and were absentees; it might be served by the unworthy; but it and its services were there. Langland points clearly to abuses. Once a fortnight perhaps some interfering friar of one of the four orders (Cain they were pleasantly nicknamed by Wyclif) would come preaching in the churchyard; and sometimes the pardoner or limiter would invade even the church itself, when the priest was not strong enough to prevent it. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a most worldly acquisitiveness was the secret of the friars activity and of the parsons hatred of them; they laid their hands on shrift money and on the widows mite, and they persuaded the richer people to ask for and to pay for letters of fraternity. The beautiful description of a friars church in Piers Plowmans creed might without change of a word be written of any well-preserved Gothic church; it must be remembered that all this wealth of stone and carving and gold was then new, burnished, shining, not toned down to melancholy beauty by the lapse of centuries.

Friar and parson were, it is probable, unlearned; the parsons charged the friars with interference, the friars charged the parsons with ignorance and neglect of their parishes. The terrible picture of Parson Sloth in Langland must of course apply only to a few, but comic instances of parsonic ignorance are many. "Robert de Umfraville, clerk, was instituted in 1317 by Bishop Stapledon to the rectory of Lapford, but the bishop required he should go to grammar school and should come to the bishop once a year, that the bishop might know what progress he was making. The young man sent in his resignation in 1320." Against such a picture may always be quoted the poor parson of the Prologue. The friar, however, was the better speaker, for it was his *métier* to speak; and the occasional visitor gets more credit than the preacher to whom the parish is accustomed. The friar was ready, polite, pleasant, popular; and his ways with women were so successful as to become proverbial.

Nothing in Langland said against the friars comes near the bitter satire of Chaucer's *Laugh*; and the praise of the friar by the wife of Bath would have shamed any one but a friar.

If the parson objected to the friar he must in many cases have objected to the chantry priest also. Rarely could a man, a paid cleric, go on singing masses every day without interfering with the parish. It was a lucrative and easy life. Sometimes the church itself was turned into a chantry, sometimes the chantry priest kept a little school. In S. Pauls alone there were 70 chantries and 111 obits (for occasional masses), and in 1378 the weak Archbishop Sudbury, who was murdered by the 1381 mob, speaks of the lives of these mass-singers as tending to the detestable scandal of churchmen (Besant, 2, 134). It could not have been satisfactory for the parson, learned or unlearned, good or bad, to have so many inspectors and critics of his work about him. He lived in a limelight which darkens shadows, and strange to say, he has had no apologist but Chaucer the courtly poet. Pity the poor parson in any century who does his multifarious work unnoticed by superiors and sometimes unthanked by his people.

The parson, the friar, the seller of pardons, as well as the higher ecclesiastics, and of course all monks, were vowed to celibacy, but it does not seem that celibacy meant chastity, or that it prevented, in the case of parsons, the irregular marriages which the Church frowned on even to the days of Queen Elizabeth. "The secular cleric," says Cutts, "was not bound to be celibate. But if his marriage came up before the ecclesiastical courts it was then voidable. Consequently, to make his marriage incapable of legal proof, he had it performed irregularly in some particular. Then it was illegal, derogatory, but not immoral or disreputable." In this the Church theory conquered till the Reformation. As Matthew Paris said long before, "the Pope deprived the clergy of sons and the devil sent them *nephews*." Langland, however, admits the chastity of many churchmen, and when Langland speaks well of even part of a class we must be careful of condemning it.

This medieval enforcement of chastity is the heaviest source of indictment which the modern reformer brings against the Church. All miracle-mongering, sale of indulgences, robbery, deceit and the like, are nothing in comparison of the "brutalising of the race," as Galton calls it, by the chastity of the sweeter and gentler and more refined characters of the time. The

modern cares little for the self-sacrifice, the agonies of the truly chaste; that is their own affair. He boldly accuses the Catholic Church of being the author of the greatest sin against Western humanity that has ever been perpetrated.

Of course the chastity was in many cases but lip-service. The contemporary records bear this out. A certain chaplain, name not known, had a portifory (breviary) stolen from him at night by a loose woman because he had not given her any money either on that night or on the night preceding; the book was pledged for 8d. (Riley, 1385). In 1385, Elisabeth Moring . . . received girls nominally as apprentices, but really to live a lewd life and to consort with friars, chaplains, and other such men (Besant). But, though John de Sloghtre, chaplain, is put in the Tower for being found wandering about the city against the peace, and was also gaoled for carrying arms (Riley, 1320); and though Richard Heryng, chaplain, was attached for that he was indicted in the ward of Farndine (Farringdon) . . . and in the ward of Crepelgate as being a bruiser and night-walker (Riley), it cannot be too carefully remembered that records always call our attention to the worst. No century would like to be remembered by the police notes of Bow Street, and no historian ought to take Langlands pages for the whole of a story. Chaucer is much brighter, happier; if everything had been as Langland paints it the century could not have gone on existing.

In any comment on Langland the monks, nuns and their convents may be almost disregarded. There were no doubt many who came out of the cloister and who rode to hounds; many nuns who deserved the terrible picture drawn by Wrath (p. 78); but they receive less castigation at the hands of the poets than does the rest of the ecclesiastical machinery. Indeed, the monks seem to be outside the machinery; and the fierce envy of conventional wealth, which was one of the main causes of the Reformation, had not yet made itself greatly felt. As for the reformers of the day, they plainly derided the monks and passed them by.

But the picture of Church matters is by no means even outlined in as yet. There remains to be considered the rabble of hangers-on, and under this uncomplimentary term may be included foreign agents, pardoners, pilgrims, palmers, hermits, ancles, recluses of all kinds, and those officials who got their living out of Church moneys, fines, or offerings. They indeed

form a motley crowd. Chaucers picture of some (*e.g.* the Pardoner and Summoner) is very clear; we see the papal agent, approved or connived at by the English bishop, selling and showing his absurd relics to the gaping crowd; the summoner ready to pounce on any defenceless person and bring him or her before an ecclesiastical court. For the summoner there may be some defence. For the pardoner it seems there is none. M. Jusserand, who would defend him if he could, admits that Chaucers picture is true; it is more damaging to admit that the truly Catholic Langland is more contemptuous even than Chaucer. But nothing disturbs the pardoner; for insolence of hypocrisy which recognises itself there is nothing to beat his Prologue and his beautiful tale; only the scathing Billingsgate of the Host brings a flush of anger to his cheek. It is true that to-day the pardoner has vanished from the streets of England; but his audiences have not vanished; and the crowds that buy nostrums from the magazine advertisements and bottles at street corners, and the stealthier and richer clients of the crystal-gazer, cannot afford even to laugh at fourteenth-century England. The pardoner has turned quack and gipsy: that is all.

The foreigner met with less approval than the pardoner. In 1353 and 1393 Englishmen were forbidden to appeal to the papal courts; Langland sees them appealing against the king. In 1351 foreigners were forbidden to hold English livings. Both these statutes aimed at extinguishing what were felt to be un-English proceedings.

But the pilgrim and the recluse were nearer to the people than the summoner, the pardoner, or the foreigner. On every road the pilgrim, with his liquified saints blood, his vernicle picture, and his scallop-shell, told of his escapes, his travels and his relics. He was a genuine person—when he had travelled; he had been, as the wife of Bath had, over many a strange stream, and if he liked had leave to lie all his life after. Langlands and Chaucers pictures are so familiar that we may illustrate from one of their contemporaries, Sir John Mandeville, a clergyman, who, writing his book in Latin, French and English, distinctly states that he had been a great traveller. The cross and reed and sponge he saw at Constantinople; he fought against Arabs for the Sultan of Babylon; he vouches for Ethiopians with one large foot and one only, used as an umbrella; for miraculous draughts of fishes, which came to the shore to be caught out of pure reverence for the king of the country, who has a very large

family; men without heads, men with eyes in their shoulders, dwerghes (dwarfs) with no mouths, but only a lytelle round hole, men with horses feet, all the marvels of the medieval map-makers are vouched for by Sir John. On his return he showed his book to the Pope, who had his statements of things seen and heard, examined, and "my book was proved for true." In the *Roman du Renart* the fox starts on pilgrimage with staff and scrip and takes sheep and donkey (Bernart the arch-priest) with him. Long before Erasmus, with his bitter satire, the people had begun to laugh at the pilgrim; he knew too much, he had been too far. But pilgrimages are by no means things of the past, nor can they be lightly laughed at. "They were dangerous, meritorious, and they showed a way to heaven. They relieved a man of work, they showed him amusing people. He and his licence were free of the roads" (Besant). With staff (bourdon) and scrip (a small bag), with bottle, rosary, shells and flasks, or other adornments, he proved his story; if he came from Palestine he wore strips of coloured cloth, sewn cross-wise on the shoulder, and the palm was sewn to clothes or carried in the hand. Vernicles (the picture of Christ), crosskeys and effigies of S. Peter and S. Paul were worn by Roman pilgrims; but alas, the Rome or Compostella pilgrim had not always been there. "W. Blakeney, shetil-maker, who pretended to be a hermit, was brought into the Guildhall for that whereas he was able to work for his food and raiment, he went about barefoot and with long hair under the guise of sanctity, and pretending to be a hermit, saying he was such and that he had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Venice and the city of Seville in Spain, and had received many good things from divers persons . . . he acknowledged that for the last six years he had lived by such fetches and deceits, and that he never was in the parts aforesaid" (Riley, 1412). At home, besides the great S. Thomas and the many roods, S. Cuthbert at Durham, S. William of York, little S. William of Norwich, S. Wulfstan of Worcester, and S. Swithin of Winchester were among saints to whom pilgrimages were frequently made (Cutts). The reader must be reminded that there is no adequate ground for questioning the occasional "miracles" which occurred and still occur in such pilgrimages. One of the most brilliant modern productions of a cultivated mind and of a religious life, I refer to the *Saintes Evangiles* of M. Lassere, owes its origin directly to a miraculous cure wrought at Lourdes. Scientists may explain, we Protes-

tants may question; but neither pilgrimages nor "miracles" are dead—yet.

The recluse—the true, strict recluse—has nothing to recommend him or her. The ghastly silence, the dirty walled-up cell, the long lone cold hours, form a picture compared with which the strictest life of Carmelite or Brigittine was comfort itself. It is suggested that the slits called lepers windows were for the use of anchorites, who had their cells outside the church walls. It is true that the recluse could in some cases talk to the outside world, and was sometimes so much consulted by the women of the place that he became a nuisance; it is equally true that some recluses did enjoy comparative comfort, though they were tied to one cell; but the true ancre was one of those who, like monk of the desert or trappist of to-day, is isolated, silent, dead. The service read over him and the subsequent condition of his days may be read and understood by the reader of Besants *London*.

Hermits were the good-tempered Timons of the day; they lived in houses, they helped travellers, they were not always poor. There is no need to waste pity on the hermit; he came from all ranks of society, as his modern counterpart does. It is not every man who is smitten with the love of the society of his own kind; and there are to-day hermits even in cities, as there were in Langlands time.

But all of whom I have been speaking were officially connected with the Church. There remains another class of friars who roamed the country before Langland had ceased writing, and who carried no licence from pope, bishop or archdeacon. I refer to Wyclifs poor priests. It is doubtful whether Langland means us to take any notice of them; whatever may have been his attitude to Wyclif, he either does not know the name of Lollard, or he intends to sever himself entirely from lollers or Lollards. There is no question connected with the 1381 revolt which is so obscure as this: did Wyclif through his poor priests preach a social as well as an ecclesiastical revolution? When we find historians such as Mr. Thorold Rogers and Mr. Trevelyan disagreeing *toto cœlo* on this point, it is well for the ordinary reader to suspend judgment. It may be enough for us to note that there seems to be no proof that Langlands book or any part of it was used to inflame the social unrest, and another interpretation may be put upon the often quoted passages in the message from the Great Society.

A much more profitable inquiry turns us away from pope and cardinal, friar and monk, hermit and pilgrim, Wyclif and Swynderby, to the central figure which, as I have said before, glances in and out of the work in such elusive and mysterious fashion. It is long before we meet Piers Plowman, but when we do meet him he never wholly leaves the stage; if not actually speaking, his presence is felt: it is the book of Piers Plowman. So strongly does the reader feel this that it has been suggested that we have here but a fragment of genuine alliterative folk-literature of which Piers Plowman is the hero. The Plowman leads the way to Truth, whose servant he is, and the cutpurse and the pardoner desert him; a stray common woman is left, and he and she begin, but others join in the great pilgrimage. Before it is begun the half-acre has to be ploughed, and knight and wastrel have to help. Ladies must help too; the work of all is for the weal of all, and Piers makes his last will and testament. Then the unemployables wrangle and Piers calls Hunger and Famine to help him; the gentry cannot. The pardon is sent by the Almighty to poor Piers Plowman, and henceforth he is a symbol which leads men to Do-well, Do-better and Do-best. He is referred to as the great example, the great teacher, until again he appears upon the scene riding to Jerusalem as the Good Samaritan to joust with death for the deliverance of humanity from hell. As Prince he sails hell-wards and the victory is assured. But Piers as Christ is gone, and Antichrist takes his place; the Piers that follows is the spirit of Church unity; the mysterious plowman, saviour, man, Christ, is now again lost, and must be sought for in a new Grail quest over the wide world. Small wonder that readers are in doubt as to Langlands meaning. I take it that Langland wilfully confused the character, for in his own mind there was no separation between the God-in-man and the man-in-God. As Bishop Stubbs says, "The full likeness to Jesus Christ, the ideal Son of God, is stored up in the Plowman, in the common man of the street and of the mill and of the workshop." Above every class and caste, sympathising with all, thinking nothing too high, nothing too low for him to notice, Piers represents the best religious thought of which Langland was capable, mans likeness to Christ and even his identification with him being made possible by the very nature of Christs appearance in the world. Love could not bear to remain in heaven; it must take mankind on it or die.

Allegory pressed hard loses its charm. If Piers Plowman were as clear outlined as Christian, the mystery of the Plowman would not fit in as it does with the chaos of the scene. He seems to suit the kaleidoscope of the field full of folk which is now a city, now a plain, now a procession, now a church, now a court, now a desolate land along which trains of pilgrims go—and always a dream. Battles and law courts vanish, Cornhill and Jerusalem disappear, and the sleeper is left upon the misty hills. From the Malvern Hills the mist never wholly goes; only now and then stands out, as in the Arthurian vision, the great figure—crowned.

Yet, though the writer leaves his work in despondency and gloom, something had been accomplished. To have seen Piers Plowman working in that whirl and worry of politics was something: to have realised that figure made life worth living to the writer, though death should be but, as he called it, the unknitter of all care and the beginning of rest.

This is the reward of the spiritual reformer, whether he be a Francis, a Shelley or a Langland: that he catches glimpses of the impossible. The light that never will be on land or sea is his inspiration, and far above any amelioration of social ethics is the spiritual sense of the son of man ploughing the fourteenth-century fields, pushing the pilgrims through the strait gate and riding through Cheapside or Jerusalem to get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon. Langland, the poor wandering mass-priest, saw over old S. Pauls the vision splendid, as a later singer, poorer than Langland, in the same London, almost in the same street, saw it and could write:

“ O world invisible, we view thee;  
 O world intangible, we touch thee;  
 O world unknowable, we know thee;  
 Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

The angels keep their ancient places,  
 Turn but a stone and start a wing;  
 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces  
 That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)  
 Cry; and upon thy so sore loss  
 Shall shine the traffic of Jacobs ladder,  
 Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my Daughter,  
 Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems;  
 And lo, Christ walking on the water,  
 Not of Gennesareth but Thames!"

If we leave the religious outlook and look upon the social side of England, we are struck by the constant repetition of the note of misery. Yet it does not appear that the century was as bad as its successor. The drain of the French wars must have been felt; yet the Great Pestilence had, in its awful way, lessened by fifty per cent. the number of mouths that had to be fed.

But Langlands complaint is not merely that the poor want food and raiment; it would appear from him that they needed protection against themselves and against the great. The adulteration of food and drink, the want of the poor mans lawyer, the general corruption and deceit all round him, the extremes of luxury and penury—these are the things that wring his heart. By way of illustration the following may be quoted from Riley as instances of dishonesty in trade; the first instance being one of the eternal quack, without whom no century can live.

In 1382, "Roger Clerk was attached to make answer to Roger atte Hacche that whereas no physician or surgeon should intermeddle with medicines but those who are experienced, the said Roger Clerk, who knew nothing of the arts aforesaid nor understood anything of letters, came to the house of him Roger atte Hacche and there saw one Johanna, the wife of the said Roger, who was then lying ill, and gave the said Roger to understand that he was experienced and skilled in the art of medicine.

"Whereupon the said Roger gave him 12 pence in part payment of a larger sum that he was to pay him in case the said Johanna should be healed. And upon this the same Roger Clerk gave the said Roger an old parchment cut or scratched across, being the leaf of a certain book, and rolled it up in a piece of cloth of gold, and this he put about her neck, but in no way did it profit her.

"And the said Roger Clerk was asked what the worth of such a parchment was, whereupon he said that upon it was written a good charm for fevers. Upon being asked by the court what were the words of this charm, he said, 'Anima Christi sanctifica me, corpus Christi salva me, sanguis Christi inebria me,' and the parchment being then examined, not one of these words was

found written thereon. And he was told by the court that a straw beneath his foot would be of as much avail for fevers as this said charm of his was, whereupon he fully granted that it would be so. And because that the said Roger was in no way a literate man, and seeing that he was found to be an infidel and altogether ignorant of the art of physic, it was adjudged that the same Roger Clerk should be led through the middle of the city with trumpets and pipes, he riding upon an horse without a saddle, the said parchment and a whetstone for his lies being hung about his neck, an urinal also being hung before him and another urinal on his back" (Riley, 465).

The following are referred to:

" . . . making pots of bad metal that come to nothing and melt; mixing any manner of wares whereof the good thing may be impaired by the old; the dubbing or moistening of any merchandise, by reason whereof the weight may be increased; selling putrid beef; making of hats, shoes or brides of poor or forbidden material . . . stealing dough by making holes in the tables used for baking; using false nets in the Thames; selling ale out of tankards with thickened bottoms.

" Godfrey le Rede was attached with his bread, and this bread was weighed and adjudicated upon before Stephen de Alyndone, mayor, and it was found that the penny loaf of light bread of the said Godfrey weighed 15s., and was wanting of its right weight to the amount of 8.2 $\frac{1}{4}$ , and upon this he said he did not make the loaf aforesaid nor had any share therein for gain or for love, and he put himself upon the country as to the same. And the country (jury) came by John de Kyngystone, pelterer, and others in the panel. Who being sworn said upon their oath that George the aforesaid is partner with John de Jernemue and Robert de Donstaple, bakers, who keep a bakehouse without Newgate just opposite Cokkes-lane, and that he shares with them in the said bakehouse and is their oven-man. Therefore it was adjudged that he should have the punishment of the hurdle" (Riley, 119).

" John Rightwys and John Penrose, taverners, being accused of selling red wine unsound and unwholesome, John Rightwys was acquitted and John Penrose shall drink a draught of the same wine and the remainder shall be poured on his head" (Riley, 1364).

"Robin Porter, servant of John Gibbe, baker of Stratford, when the bread inspection came, knowing that the bread of his master was not of full weight, took a penny loaf and in it falsely and fraudulently inserted a piece of iron weighing about 4 oz. with intent to make the said loaf weigh more in deceit of the people" (Riley, 1387).

As a lover of the poor Langland hated adulteration; but it is difficult to understand why he shared so clearly with the 1381 rebellion its hatred of lawyers. We can see why the Rev. John Ball and his well-to-do friends burnt manor-rolls and charters and hunted lawyers to death. A lawyer to them meant a man who carried out or brought into operation the hated statutes which for forty years tried to fix wages after the Black Death. But Langland, as Jusserand says, cursed the revolt, and explicitly states that he did not sympathise with the cry for high wages. I think the explanation lies in Langlands belief that no juryman or siser, no panel, no inquest or collection of witnesses and neighbours collected to weigh the truth was ever honest. They were all got at by Meed. And the poor man, being poor and unversed in the ways of bribery, could get no lawyer to help him. There was no man to set the poor right in the usage of the law courts, civil and ecclesiastical. Justice should have been freely administered, not bought and sold, nor even paid for. Langlands Utopia is still Utopia, for even to-day the friendly lawyer will counsel his friend to keep clear of the honest but distrusted courts—distrusted because of long bills and unsatisfactory conclusions. The poor mans doctor is with us, a real blessing; but the poor mans lawyer has not yet made his appearance in the land.

Of corruption Langland cannot say enough. Meed is over all; Simony, the worst bane of the medieval Church (as a Catholic writer puts it), was only one of the hydras heads. The most shameless bribery went on in high places, and no more disgraceful instance can be given than that of Richard Lyon, a condemned minister of the Crown, who actually sent a barrel of gold to the dying Prince, in order to win his help. To insult the Black Prince thus at any time of his life would have been bad enough, but so to deride and flatter the purest friend of the commons when he lay helpless and in grievous pain seems one of the most shameless acts in history.

Beyond the corruption and the inability to get justice done

for the poor man, Langland turned his careful and observant eye on luxury, especially on luxury in dress. Chaucer is at one with him, and though he laughs at the excess of dress in his poems, in his prose he very nearly calls it one of the eight deadly sins. It would seem as if modern luxury in dress were really less than that of the fourteenth century, and the wife of Bath's matinee hat was as broad as is a targe, surely an acreage to which we have not yet attained. The regulations of the time are very particular in their condemnation of the use of various furs by the common lewd women who dwell in the city of London, forbidding them to wear any manner of noble budge; but Pernel Proudheart was by no means the only offender; in 1363 sumptuary laws had been passed regulating the dress of England. Even the clergy dressed in all colours and carried short swords, and it is said did not always take the trouble to put on a black gown at a funeral.

As for arms and armour, Langland seems to hate them far more than the luxurious dress. He was no soldier like Chaucer, and took no delight in enumerating the pieces of armour worn by the knight. To him armour meant weapons and weapons meant wounds, and war was as barbarous as it had seemed to the old Hebrew prophet. Chivalry and its accompanying virtues meant less than nothing and vanity to the chantry priest; and very greatly would he have disapproved of Robert Newby, rector of Whitchurch, who leaves his brother his best sword; of the vicar of Gaynford, who leaves his best suit of armour and all of his arrows; still more would he have admonished John Wyndhill, rector of Arnecliffe, who in 1431 leaves a copy of *Piers Plowman* and green sanguine and murrey gowns and a baselard (knife) with ivory and silver handle.

He dislikes the feasting and the minstrels as much as the weapons; they are Judas children, tellers of loose stories, and he would have answered to any one of them who said he had a licence as the indignant sixteenth-century writer answered, "Have you a licence from Christ Jesus?"

These fighters and minstrels and wastrels moved him to fierce indignation. But his heaviest wrath is reserved for the discontented workman, and for the man who will not work. Though he hated lawyers who tried to get the Statute of Labourers enforced, he had no sympathy at all with the men who wished to force wages higher. It is amusing to see how many statutes and regulations were passed against the able-bodied beggars.

No person, according to statute, was allowed to relieve them, and in 1359 occurs the following entry:

“ Forasmuch as many men and women and others of divers counties who might work to the help of the common people have betaken themselves out of their own country to the City of London, and do go about begging there so as to have their own ease and repose, not wishing to labour or work for their sustenance, to the great damage of such the common people, and also do waste divers alms which would otherwise be given to many poor folk such as lepers, blind, halt and persons oppressed with old age and divers other maladies, we do therefore command that all those who go about begging and who are able to work shall quit the said city between now and Monday next ” (Riley).

“ John Warde of York and R. Lynham of Somerset were questioned for that whereas they were stout enough to work for their food and raiment and had their tongues to talk with, they did pretend they were mutes, they went about carrying a two-ell measure and an iron hook and pincers and a piece of leather in shape like a part of a tongue edged with silver and with writing around it: ‘ This is the tongue of R. Warde: ’ with which instruments they gave persons to understand they were traders and that they had been plundered and robbed of their goods, they making an horrible noise like unto a roaring and opening their mouths, to the manifest deceit of the whole of the people ” (Riley, 1380).

An extract from the *Standard* of October 6, 1911, is interesting by way of comment:

“ William Thomas, a blind maker, of East Surrey Road, was charged with begging from foot passengers at Rosebery Avenue, Clerkenwell. A constable said he heard Thomas say to a gentleman: ‘ Give a penny to a poor old cripple.’ ”

“ Thomas was bound and bandaged on his first appearance in court, splinters and slings being used for his arms and legs. He now came up on remand without any of these professional impedimenta. The officer said that there was only an old wrist strain. He was sentenced to three months’ hard labour.”

And in the daily press of October 11, 1911, I find a magistrate recommending an iron muzzle for quarrelsome women. In

Langlands time branks (leathern gags) were used. As for the inefficiency of work of which Langland so bitterly complains, the reader may be referred to *The Common Growth* of Miss M. Loane, written last year:

“ In another small town where lads professed that work of any kind was extremely hard to get, I found an old established tradesman, a leading councillor and a J.P., taking down the shutters and sweeping out the shop. . . . I had the loafing son of a widow in my mind. The worthy justice also knew the widows son and many others. Clinging to his broom he hastily assured me that the loss of time was nothing compared with what he had wasted in trying to make boys do the work.”

And Langlands beggars, who will have hot meat quite hot, and that of the best, find their modern counterparts:

“ As to bacon, I can’t get them (cottagers) to try good Danish at  $8\frac{1}{2}d.$ , though ordinary English is up to  $11d.$  just now, and the best is at a fancy price. And none but the best English cheese will do for them, however small a bit their money will run to.”—*The Common Growth* (Miss M. Loane), 1911.

Truly the fourteenth century does not seem to be so very far away.

The tragic events in the period of history over which Langland cast his eye were the Black Death of 1349, the death of the Black Prince in 1376, and the Peasants Revolt of 1381. The Black Death, by emptying the land of labour, was the cause of the famous statute by which for forty years an attempt was made to regulate and keep down the wages of the free-contracting labourer. The consequent discontent, rendered greater by the continuation of the French wars, swelled into the Peasants Revolt; but that revolt would in all probability never have occurred had the Black Prince, who was on the side of the disaffected, lived to make headway against the nobles. Parliament, though ready to fight for the people, could do little; the deeds of the Good Parliament of 1376 were writ in water; “ all its acts were cancelled, and the statute-book bears no trace of the greatest assembly of the period.” The day of reckoning came. Opinions are freely divided on the subject of the revolt. We seem to know everything about it except the answer to this question, “ Who was at the back of it? ” Some say the well-to-do

middle class in the country; some hint that the youthful king used the revolt, if he did not actually suggest it, as a weapon against the great nobles. Some again say, while others deny, that Wyclifs poor priests engineered what was known as the Great Society. We may be certain of this, that Langland strongly disapproved of it, although, as Professor Thorold Rogers thinks, the revolt may have put back the Reformation for a century and a half. The revolt failed, and Langland, seeing only its turbulence and murders, was content that it should fail; he had no hopes for his day from any social change; the horizon was that of "the collied night;" he was a social reformer from one standpoint only—the standpoint of religion. Without this, according to him, all social reform is meaningless, and must lead to greater luxury and greater discontent. None but Piers Plowman can save the people that he loved.

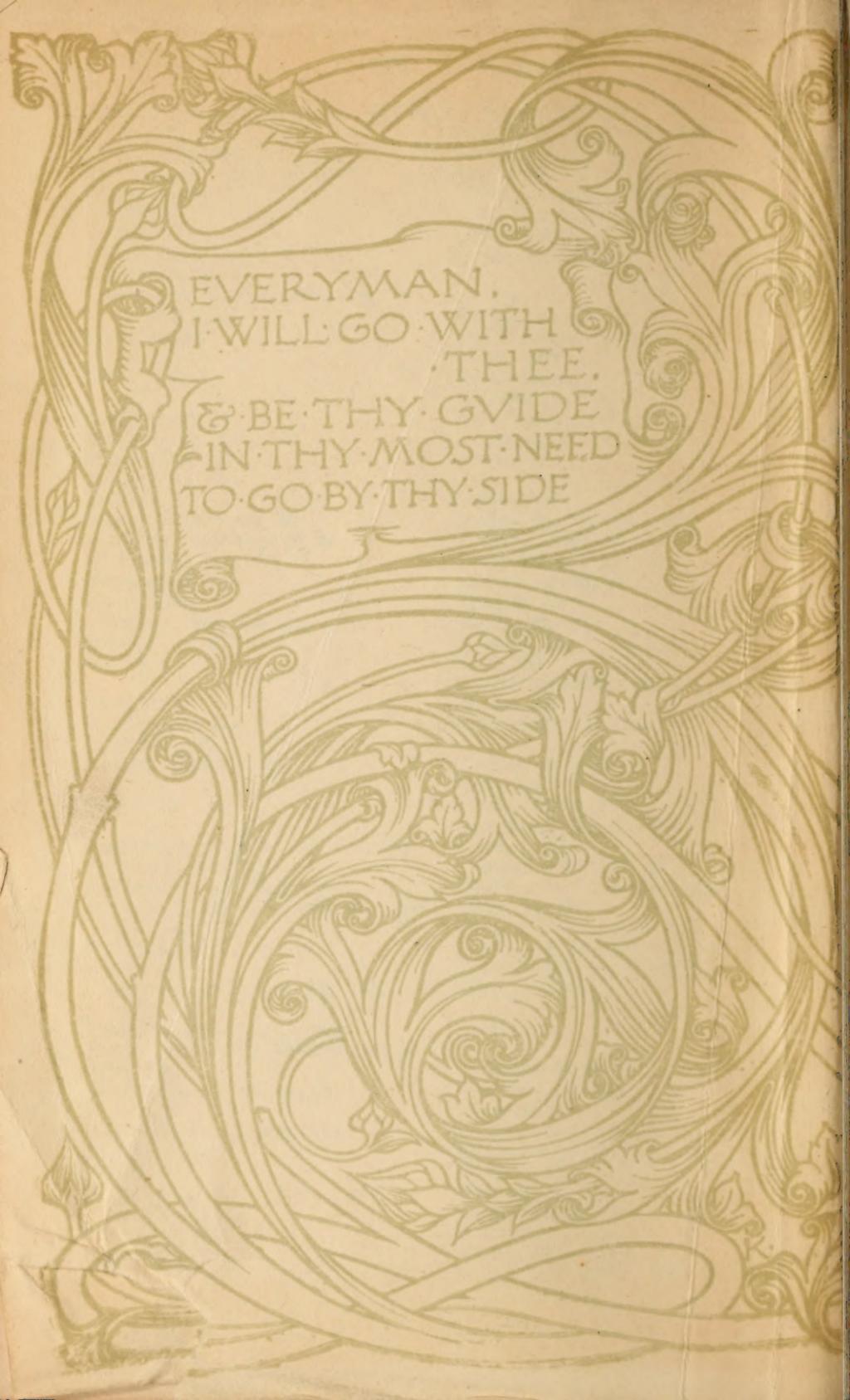
For above all writers he is the peoples friend. None is more intolerant of their sad condition, none is more outspoken than he to king, bishop, knight, friar and huckster. The poor he has always in his heart. We do well to put up statues to Howard and to Quintin Hogg, and Guy dreams in stone among the people whom he helped; but as yet no statue stands in Cornhill, no glass blazes in the Abbey in memory of this champion of the poor. Perhaps it is better so, considering his indignant condemnation of the stained window and the church advertisement. Like Thomas à Kempis, he would prefer to be unknown and thought nothing of; and his work is, by wicked irony, interesting only to the student of history and the examinee. The book, however, demands—and never more loudly than now—that it should be read again and again by any who care to see the bitterness and the hope, the despair and the exultation of him who wrote four centuries ago the Vision of the Peoples Christ.

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